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THE
HOUSE
ON THE BRIDGE

OTHER TALES
BY
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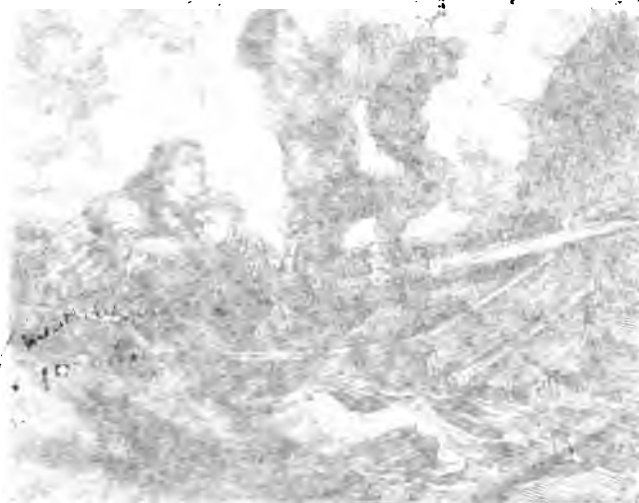
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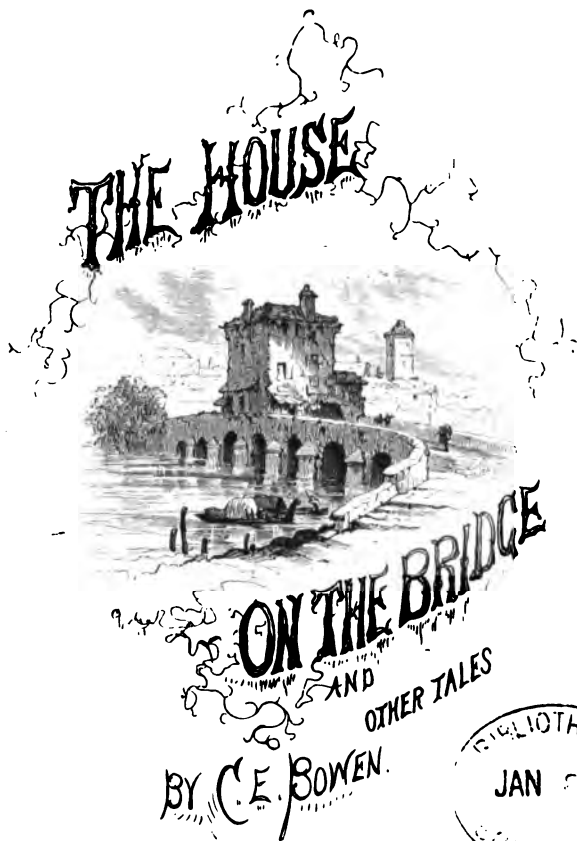
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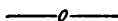
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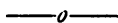


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I.

THE HOUSE ON THE BRIDGE.



ANY years ago there was an unusually wet season in the North of Italy. There had been incessant heavy rains, which had swollen the rivers, and caused them in many parts to overflow their banks. Some apprehension began to be felt about the bridge that crossed the Adige at Verona, which had to support not only its own weight, but that of a very substantial house which was built upon it. Opinions about its safety were divided. Some declared

that the supports had weathered many a long year and many a trying season. Others, again, argued that for this very reason they would be likely to give way, and that it was rash and unreasonable to expect the old bridge to last for ever; and they said it ought to be examined, and its safety or danger determined by a competent judge.

But in those days, as in these, people are apt to talk a long time before they act; and though the worthy citizens of Verona consulted, and croaked, and shook their heads over the subject, week after week passed on, and no active steps were taken. Moreover, fear was lulled by the weather apparently taking a decided turn for the better. The clouds dispersed, a bright Italian sun shone forth for nearly a fortnight, and turned public attention from the bridge and its possible danger.

The house on the bridge had for years been inhabited by a family named Lalande. The father of Pierre Lalande had been a hairdresser in Paris, but having married a girl from Verona, she had persuaded him to go and settle there, as there was an opening for a man following his trade. He took the Bridge

House, and drove a good trade, and his son Pierre Lalande succeeded to it at his death. He and his wife Marie, and four children, were the occupiers of the house at the time of which we speak. Pierre's mother, now an old woman, resided with them.



Lalande was a light-hearted, careless sort of man, who looked on the bright side of everything, which it is always well to do ; but in his case, unfortunately, there was a want of foresight and of ordinary prudence mixed with his naturally happy disposition, which had more than once in his life cost him dear.\* He was very fond of singing a couplet he had invented for his own edification :

'Never go half-way to trouble ;  
If you do, you make it double.'

‘There’s sense and there’s nonsense in that rhyme of yours that you are always humming,’ said a customer to him one day; ‘it might be as well to put it another way :

‘Man, we know, is born to trouble;  
Thoughtlessness may make it double.’

‘That’s like you, Signor Baboli,’ said Lalande, laughing, ‘always croaking about goodness knows what! Now you see I am a Frenchman on my father’s side, and I take things easy.’

Lalande’s wife, Marie, was a gentle, affectionate woman, who looked up to her husband, and thought everything he said was right. Her business, she considered, was to keep the house and look after her children, provide plenty of clean napkins to put under the chins of the gentlemen who came to be shaved (for Lalande was a barber as well as a hairdresser), and have her own caps and aprons spotlessly white. Beyond these things, the little black-eyed Italian woman had no cares. She loved their home, with its prospect up and down the river, and warmly seconded what had long been the desire of her husband’s heart, viz. to purchase it for their own. But

though trade was good, they had never saved money enough to pay the price asked by their landlord, who was willing enough to sell it if any one wished to buy it. Hitherto, however, nobody had applied. Fond as Lalande and his family were of the situation, it was not a coveted one generally. At length a distant relative of theirs died, and left them a sum of money sufficient to make the desired purchase. The house was bought, and Lalande's voice sounded more cheerily than ever as he leaned of an evening over the parapet of the bridge, singing snatches of French and Italian songs. The house was bought in the autumn, and it was during the following winter that the rains of which we have spoken were so violent. It seems natural to suppose that Lalande would be one of those to take alarm about the safety of his house, which he now regarded with such satisfaction as his own property. But no; he did but laugh at the notion of danger; and when advised to try and call the attention of the authorities to the subject, he said 'he only hoped they would leave it alone, or maybe they might be ordering them out of the house, or pulling it down.'

‘Better so than that the house should pull you and your family down into the river, Lalande,’ said one of his friends. ‘I tell you plainly, I wouldn’t trust the old bridge if I were you.’

‘And I trust it entirely,’ replied Lalande. ‘It has stood all these years, and will stand many another.’

‘Well, it’s your own look-out,’ replied the other, who was a silversmith, living in the market square, but who often went to smoke a pipe with Lalande on the bridge. ‘We have had the worst of the rains, it is to be hoped, and the weather seems to be clearing up at last, yet I don’t like that great bank of clouds over there,’ and he pointed in the direction of the setting sun. ‘They portend a change again, I fear.’

‘Don’t croak, man,’ said Lalande; and he sung his favourite lines :

‘Never go half-way to trouble ;  
If you do, you’ll make it double.’

‘I wouldn’t go half-way to meet it, certainly,’ replied his friend, ‘but there’s a difference between doing that and shutting one’s eyes to danger which may bring trouble that might be

avoided. Good-night, I must home to my supper.'

'And I to mine,' said Lalande; and stopping only to shake the ashes out of his wooden pipe into the waters of the Adige as they ran swiftly under the arch over which he stood, he turned into the house with the feeling of satisfaction that always now arose within him when he looked around at what was no longer the property of another, but his very own.

That night the bank of clouds took advantage as it were of the darkness, and moved stealthily upwards till they covered the sky above Verona and all the surrounding country. Very noiselessly they spread themselves; for the air was perfectly still, and the good people of Verona went comfortably to their beds, expecting undisturbed slumbers till morning.

Lalande sat up late, for he had his accounts to look over; then he, too, went to bed and slept soundly, so much so that he did not hear the rain descending in torrents and the waters of the Adige rushing wildly beneath them, till his wife aroused him to listen; for she had never heard rain like it, nor the river so noisy.

'Hark, too, at the wind, Pierre!' she ex-



claimed ; ' it sounds like a wild beast let loose. I have been listening to its moaning noise for some time, but all of a sudden it has begun to shriek and yell.'


As she spoke, a flash of forked lightning darted past their window, which was followed instantaneously by a clap of thunder that shook the house to its foundations. Marie clung to her husband in speechless alarm, and the voices of the terrified children called to their parents from the next room.

The infant alone slept on in its cradle by Marie's side, unconscious of the alarm going on around it.

There was a pause of a few moments, during which Lalande hurried on his clothes, and bid his wife do the same.

' Another such shock as that might bring down the house,' he said.

As he spoke, another flash and another peal of thunder came like the previous one. The children screamed, and were joined loudly by poor Lizette, the young servant-maid, who had crept down from her attic with her dress hastily thrown over her night-gown, and had heard her master express his doubt as to



whether the house would survive a second such shock.

‘Let us fly, master!’ she exclaimed. ‘Let us get out of the house and off the bridge. I’ve heard people say it isn’t safe.’

‘Peace, girl!’ said Lalande; ‘the clouds are breaking, and the storm seems passing away; and if so, the bridge and the house are safe enough.’

He was right in supposing the storm had done its worst. There was another flash, but it was a faint one; another peal, but it sounded far away.

‘We had better all go to bed again,’ said Lalande. ‘It is close upon daybreak. The rain is less violent now, and we need not be afraid any longer.’

‘Thank God and the Virgin!’ said poor Lizette, who was still trembling all over; and she ventured to her room again, and hurried into bed without taking off her dress, less from any idea of getting up again than because she wanted to lose no time in burying her head under the clothes, that she might not see the flash or hear the thunder if it returned.

The children soon fell asleep. . So also did

easy-going, light-hearted Lalande, who, the moment he thought danger was over, was as contented and unconcerned as if there had never been any, and only slept the sounder because he had been disturbed. Not so Marie Lalande, his wife. Her nerves had been too completely upset for her to be able to compose herself quickly, so she lay listening to the now comparatively mild rain as it beat against the window-panes, and to the louder sound of the river, boiling and foaming against the supports of the bridge.

It was cheering to see daylight stealing through the window, and gradually enabling her to recognise the objects around her. The rain, too, ceased ; and as for the noise made by the river, loud as it was, it sounded less to Marie than it would have done to another, because she was so accustomed to the constant splash and dash when it was swollen and excited by storms. At length she fell into a dose, but how long it lasted she never knew.

A strange noise aroused her, and she started up in the bed, which seemed shaking under her. The noise was as of a cartful of stones turned out upon a hard ground. Was

it an earthquake? was her first thought; her second, Could the bridge be falling?

She shook her husband, who slept on. 'Pierre,' she cried, 'awake, awake! something is happening, perhaps the bridge has given way.'

'Nonsense,' said Lalande, 'the bridge is safe enough; you have been dreaming.'

But it was no dream. Marie had sprung to the window. She threw it open.

'O my God, have mercy on us!' she exclaimed. 'The bridge *has* given way at both ends.'

It was too true. Lalande leaned out of the window, and turned pale at what he saw. Each end of the bridge had fallen; two arches were gone, those nearest them were tottering. The river was surging like the sea. They felt the house shaking as if it might be down every minute.

'I fear it will be all over with us before we can get help,' exclaimed Lalande in a voice of anguish. 'Would that I had listened to warning!' He waved a signal of distress from the window, and called to Lizette to do the same from above. There was no fear that the terrified girl would not do her best to give

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the alarm. She rushed out on to the roof, screaming at the highest pitch of her voice, and waving a towel in each hand. The city was already aroused. A crowd rapidly collected on the shore of the river, but the danger of going to the rescue of the unfortunate family was enormous, and could scarcely be ventured without almost certain loss of life ; for timbers were floating, or rather being hurled about by the furious current with a force that must upset any boat that came in contact with them. Moreover, there was the danger—and a still more terrible one—that the house might fall any instant, killing not only those within it, but any one who should be near in a boat at the moment of its falling.

Another arch went in. The house could be seen to sway about by those on the banks, and the screams of the frantic mother and her children were distinctly heard. Poor Lizette was seen on the roof, with her hands held out piteously to the crowd for help. Several boats were near, but the boatmen shook their heads. One man seemed disposed to go ; but his wife hung upon his arm, and besought him not to rush to certain death.

A nobleman, well known in the city, who had a villa at a little distance, came riding up on horseback at a furious pace. He took in the position of affairs in an instant, and as the screams from the bridge fell on his ear, he rode towards the boats, and shouted, 'A thousand lires<sup>1</sup> to whoever will go to save them!' The boatmen looked at each other, but shook their heads.

'Two thousand!' cried the count, who grew almost frantic as more of the bridge fell in.

'If you offer twenty thousand it is useless,' said one of the men. 'It would but be the sacrifice of another life, and we have all got wives and children to live for.'

The count turned away his horse's head from the speaker. 'May God have mercy on their souls,' he said aloud. 'They will all be in eternity in a few minutes.'

Suddenly, a tall, powerful young man, in the dress of a Tyrolean peasant of the better class, was seen hastening from the city towards the place where the boats lay. There was something almost commanding in his appearance, for he bore in his countenance

<sup>1</sup> About £40.

and in his walk an air of determination and high resolve. He gave a hasty glance at the boats, and pointed to the one he wished to take. Then kneeling down for an instant, he folded his hands in silent prayer; the next moment he pushed off into the water. He evidently understood the management of a boat; but as he approached the centre arch, on which stood the reeling, tottering house, it seemed as if the angry waters were making sport of his efforts to reach it. At length he contrived to bring the boat under the windows. Every stroke of his oar had been watched by the poor creatures in the bridge-house with trembling anxiety, and Marie Lalande and her baby were lowered into it the instant it was possible to do so. Then came the grandmother and the children, one by one. Poor Lizette helped her master to lower them, and in her haste to follow, nearly lost her life by trying to jump in without waiting for the rope to guide her. Lalande was the last; and as the boat moved off towards the shore, another arch gave way, and the house rocked backwards and forwards like the top of a poplar tree in the wind. It was a moment of

awful excitement. Fall it must, that was evident, and it depended on *which* side it fell whether the inmates of the boat were to be in an instant sent into eternity, or whether they might still have a chance of escape.

There was a hush all over the crowd, and then the bridge-house fell with a crash on the off side of the bridge, away from the boat, which was all but upset ; but the same mercy which had saved it from one danger protected it from the other also, and in a few moments the rescued family and their noble deliverer were safe.

But who was he that had done a deed never to be forgotten in Verona so long as a bridge spans the Adige, and the river runs on its course, and generations follow each other to tell the tale ?

So asked Count Palverino when he rode up to the young man, and, uncovering his head, asked permission to shake hands with him.

‘ My name is one never heard of,’ said the young man. ‘ You see by my dress that I am from another country. I am but journeying through Verona, and am glad to have done some service on my way.’



‘You have made Verona feel ashamed,’ said the count, ‘that not one of her own sons would come forward as a stranger has done.’

‘But I am a wanderer,’ replied he. ‘I have neither wife nor child, scarcely even a friend to care whether I live or die. I could venture my life when others might be wrong to do so.’

‘I offered 2000 liras to whoever would go to the rescue of the family,’ said the count. ‘It is yours, and the city will doubtless double the sum.’

‘Thanks, signor, but I would rather not take it. I did not risk my life for gold, but because I liked to do what I could for my fellow beings.’

‘But the money is yours, not mine,’ said the count. ‘You *must* consent to receive it.’

‘Then, since it is mine,’ he replied, ‘I will ask you to give it from me to the poor family who have just lost all they possess; it will set them afloat again.’

‘It shall be as you wish,’ said the count; ‘but will you not come to my house for at least a few days? I shall esteem it an honour to have you under my roof.’

‘I thank you, but it cannot be,’ replied the young man. ‘I must away on my journey. I have business on hand and cannot delay.’ So saying, he bowed to the count in a way that convinced that nobleman, what his speech had previously made him suspect, that though in the garb of a Tyrolean peasant, he was one of high and gentle birth, who did not wish to give his name. Nor would he stop to receive all the gratitude and homage that were awaiting him. He passed out of Verona as he came in, unknown even by name. Some supposed him to be a pilgrim or a penitent in disguise. Others, that he was a man of rank, who had adopted that garb because he liked to travel *incog*. But though unknown, his noble deed is remembered in Verona, and is assuredly noted down in the book of Him who has said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’





## SCRAGS' MISSION.





## II.

### SCRAGS' MISSION.



THE old saying, 'Never so much alone as in a crowd,' was a very true one in the case of old John Dobson the rag-gatherer, who some years ago was to be seen going his rounds from house to house, to collect all the used-up and thrown away bits of calico and linen that the servants could collect against his regular visits. Somehow or other he seemed to make his trade answer; for he was by no means a shabbily-dressed man, nor did his appearance convey the impression of an ill-

fed one. Indeed, there was an air of respectability about him which was scarcely consistent with his two rag bags, one of which slung over his shoulder, and the other on his arm, were generally stuffed so full by the end of his rounds, that they were almost more than he could carry.

What had been Dobson's early history no one knew. He was a man of few words, never speaking one more than was absolutely necessary. He lived in a room on the top of a house in one of the most densely populated parts of London. A number of families resided in the same building, which was constantly changing tenants; but whilst others came and went away, John Dobson remained stationary. Year after year saw him ever in the same place, going down-stairs with his empty bags in the morning, and returning with them well filled in the evening, speaking to no one, caring for no one, and nobody either speaking to or caring for him. Had he lived on a desert island, he could scarcely have been more lonely or companionless than he was in the midst of numbers of his fellow beings. And so, unloving and unloved, he had grown

into a morose, gloomy old man. His former history is soon told. He had married while still young a woman to whom he was deeply attached. She left him when their one child, a girl, was about seven years old. What became of her he never knew, further than that she went to New Zealand with a man of as little principle as herself. Dobson's child became his only comfort. Relations he had none near enough for him to keep up any acquaintance with them. In those days he held a situation as porter in a large warehouse, and had good pay as well as rooms in the warehouse. He engaged an elderly woman as his housekeeper, and to look after his child. But one day little Mary complained of sore throat, which ended in scarlet fever, and carried her off in a week. From that time Dobson became an altered man, altered sadly for the worse. He took to drinking by way of drowning his misery; little by little the habit grew upon him, till at last he became its slave. The result was that he lost his situation and his home, and went forth almost a beggar. A severe illness came as a blessing to him. He was taken to an infirmary, and



lay for some time between life and death. When at length he recovered, he was entirely cured of his habit of drinking to drown thought; for he had taken the greatest dislike to spirituous liquor in any shape, and never again did it pass his lips; but he seemed to have taken also a dislike to all mankind. Neither man, woman, or child did he care for.

He would not go back to his former employers to try to get work as a reformed character; but remembering that a man he had once known had picked up a living by buying and sorting rags for a paper mill, he began to try to collect them. Finding he was likely to get sufficient money to supply his wants, he took a room, and from that time made it his home; but no person but himself ever entered it. His misfortunes had turned him into a selfish, unsympathizing misanthrope.

It is difficult to imagine how a person could suffer life to pass away, and old age creep on, in such utter loneliness. But so it was with Dobson. The force of habit grows stronger and stronger year by year; and few things take deeper root than selfishness and solitude,

if once they are allowed to gain ground in a character.

Yet this strange man had a heart, though it was overgrown and choked up as to its affections; and so it came to pass that this heart was, after long years of coldness and hardness, to be warmed and softened into sympathy by so small and insignificant an object as a little dog!

One day, whilst going his usual rounds, he was kept waiting at the door of a small tradesman for a time. Suddenly a woman came running down the stairs, which were opposite to the door, driving before her a dog that was yelling from fright and pain as she laid one heavy blow after another upon him. The poor animal had broken a china bowl on which she set great value, and her fury at the moment was unbounded. Another hard blow fell as he reached the bottom of the staircase; and the unfortunate little fellow made a dart towards Dobson, as he stood there with his bags, and lying down at his feet, looked up beseechingly into his face, uttering a low moan, which seemed to say, 'Save me, save me.' Dobson was touched with pity; and

seeing another blow descending, he hastily warded it off by interposing his bag, half filled with rags, between the stick and the dog. Several passers-by stopped, their curiosity being aroused at the scene; for the woman was red with anger, and speaking very loud. Her husband came out of the shop to see what the disturbance was about, and felt somewhat ashamed of his wife's excited appearance, as she held the uplifted stick in her hand, and exclaimed, 'I will beat him till he is dead, the nasty brute!'

'Here, man,' said the shopman, anxious to put a stop to the scene; 'take the dog and drown him, to get him out of the way; and here's a shilling for your trouble. Put him into your bag,' he added, as he saw the numbers round the door were increasing. The bag was capacious, and the dog was a small one. He allowed Dobson to lift him up, and stuff him down into the bag among the rags, much to the amusement of the lookers-on. 'Sell his skin to make parchment of,' cried one of them. 'Take him to the Thames and drown him,' said another. 'Carry him off, and do what you like with him,'

said the master; 'only get him away from here.'

Off went Dobson with his burden as fast as he could go, followed by a few children, curious to see what he would do next; but they soon fell back, finding there was not likely to be any further sport.

The dog lay so perfectly still, that Dobson began to think he must be dead. The river was not far away, and thither he bent his footsteps. Then opening the bag he pulled forth his prisoner, who was very glad to be released, although he had thought it politic to keep as still as possible whilst being carried away from the scene of the recent war.

'What am I to do with you?' said Dobson, looking at the thin, half-starved animal whose intelligent eyes were watching his. 'I suppose the right way will be to tie a stone to your neck and throw you in. There's so little of you, you won't be long drowning.'

Did the poor creature understand what he said, or something of the meaning of his speech? Whether or no, certain it is he began to shiver and shake all over; and putting down his head and ears, he wriggled

himself along till he nestled close to Dobson, and then he laid his head on his foot, and looked up at him with a beseeching, imploring expression that the old man could not withstand. 'So you want to live, do you?' said he; 'well, so you shall. But what's to become of you? why, you are half-starved already. I've half a mind to let you come home with me, I have.' With considerable sagacity the cunning little fellow chose that moment to rise up; and sitting before him, he begged with all his might in the well-known dog attitude which is so far more eloquent than words.

It settled the matter. Dobson drew up the strings of his bag, and put it on his arm. Then he gave the dog's head a pat and walked off, the animal following close at his heels.

'I must call you something. I wonder what your name is,' said Dobson. 'I know what you ought to be called, at all events—"Scrags;" that's the short of "Scraggy," and scraggy you are and no mistake. Come on, "Scrags, Scrags;" why, you seem to take to the name kindly enough.'

Whatever had been his former appellation, his new one was evidently perfectly satisfactory to Scrags, who answered to it with a knowing cock of the ears and tail whenever his new master uttered it.

So they walked off together, and the river was allowed to flow on undisturbed as far as they were concerned.

Whether Scrags comprehended in full how narrow an escape he had had from adding another to the vast number of dogs that Father Thames goes on from day to day receiving into his capacious bed, cannot of course be known. The probability is that he understood it all perfectly, and that his little heart was swelling with gratitude to his deliverer, though he had no way of showing it except by now and then giving his hand a lick whenever he could get a chance to do so by Dobson putting down his bag for a moment, in order to shift it on to the other arm.

I once read of an evil-disposed man, who was about to do a bad deed, being stopped and reclaimed from vicious habits by the circumstance of a little child putting her arms round

his neck and kissing his face all over, and saying how she loved him.

Perhaps it was something of the same sort of effect that poor, grateful Scrags' lick had on Dobson, for new and kindly feelings, to which he had long been a stranger, began to move in his heart; and seeing that Scrags limped, owing to one of his recently-received blows having fallen on his leg, he stooped down and lifted him into his arms, and so carried him home. The dog had hitherto led from his very birth a life of cuffs and blows, having been only tolerated because he had been supposed to be of some use in sleeping in the shop by night, ready to bark and give the alarm in case of thieves.

It must have been a very new sensation to him to be carried carefully in Dobson's arms through the streets, every now and then receiving a kind word. He had a very humble opinion of himself, as was natural after the treatment he had always received. He little thought that he, even *he*, insignificant little animal as he was, had quite a great work to do—nothing less than unsealing the fountain of old Dobson's sympathies, which had been closed for so many years.

Dobson's first business when he reached his room was to examine Scrags' leg. It was not broken, but considerably bruised and hurt; so he tore up an old pocket handkerchief and bound it up carefully. Then he laid him on a heap of sorted rags, whilst he began preparations for tea. First he lighted the fire, which was ready laid; for Dobson was a very tidy, particular person, and never left his room of a morning till he had made it clean and comfortable. Then he put the kettle on to boil whilst he arranged his little round tea-table. Small as it was, it was big enough for the one teacup, and plate, and teapot. But there was a bit of bacon to fry; for Dobson always liked to have something hot and tasty at tea. Plain bread and butter did not satisfy him now he was making such a good thing of his rag collecting. Scrags lay on the bag, watching all he did, every now and then giving a little tap with his tail when he saw or heard anything that interested him very much, such as the putting a loaf on the table, or the jingling of one plate against another; which sound reminded him of dinner-time, when a bit of fat or gristle, or a hard crust, had

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occasionally been tossed to him. He was terribly hungry now, poor fellow; and when the savoury smell of the bacon reached his nose, he could refrain no longer from proclaiming the fact. Tap, tap went his tail quite furiously as the bacon was put on the table, and it told Dobson what he wanted plainly enough. The old man took no notice at first; but each time he put a bit into his mouth, the tail tapped so hard that at last he stopped eating, mixed some bread with the remainder of the bacon, and put the plate before Scrags, who made short work of sending it down his hungry throat.

It may seem a very small thing to have done, this giving a part of his own supper to the dog; but things are often great or small in proportion to circumstances. Now let it be remembered that this was the first time Dobson had given away even a mouthful of food for many years, and that now he deprived himself of half of his own meal to feed Scrags; and the little simple act of charity becomes of more consequence, and shows also that although Dobson had been a good friend to Scrags, yet Scrags was unconsciously being an equally

good friend to him. But the dog was in such a famished state, that the bacon and bread he had swallowed seemed to have gone for nothing! Scarcely had Dobson finished his first cup of tea, than there was Scrags tapping with his tail harder than ever, and it was clear that his appetite was quite unsatisfied. What was to be done? There was only bread enough for breakfast. Dobson was too tired to go out again, yet he did not like his little new guest to continue hungry.

Now in a certain three-cornered cupboard where Dobson kept whatever constituted his larder, lay a large beef bone, from which the meat had been pretty nearly demolished, and was destined by its owner to be made into a basin of good broth for next day's dinner. Dobson was partial to broth, as old people often are when their teeth are the worse for wear. It occurred to him *how* Scrags would enjoy that bone; but there came also the remembrance that if *he* had it, there would be no nice basin of broth with plenty of bread broken into it for dinner for himself; so he hastily put aside the first idea, and began to wash up his tea things. But still that tail went tap, tap,

and still Dobson felt inhospitable when he heard it.

At length he went to his cupboard, took out the bone, looked lovingly at it, noticed that there was a little meat left underneath, and felt almost resolved to put it back. But the more generous impulse prevailed, and so he brought it and laid it before Scrags, who pounced upon it with hungry eagerness.

From that moment there arose a friendship between these two which lasted till death. A feeling of gratitude bound Scrags to his new master, and Dobson loved Scrags because he was the dog's protector and benefactor.

Scrags' leg soon got well; and with better feeding he speedily began to grow plump and good-looking. He was a mongrel terrier, and remarkably intelligent. He became so much of a companion, that Dobson often wondered how he had got on without him. He used to take him on his rounds sometimes, but not always; for he found he was in danger of losing him when he went into crowded streets. When he left him at home, Scrags looked very sorrowful; but his joy at his return, which he manifested by innumerable twistings and con-

tortions the instant Dobson opened the door, was both pleasant and amusing to the old man, who had for so many years returned to a solitary home without a welcome.

But still Dobson shunned his neighbours. He kept his door fast closed to every one but Scrags, whose work was not done yet. True, he had opened the fountain of sympathy in his master's heart by his own friendless condition, but as yet it was but as a tiny trickle flowing only for a little dog. It was to be his task to enlarge the stream, and turn it into another channel.

Next door to Dobson's room on the attic landing was a widow and her child, a girl of about eight years of age. She was very poor, and laboured hard for the support of herself and little Susie, who was extremely delicate after an attack of the measles, which had also left her eyes so weak that she could use them scarcely at all. Her mother went out as a charwoman, and it was lonely work for the poor child, whom she was obliged to leave by herself all day long almost without occupation, because of the state of her eyes. Mrs. Stone was very careful of her, and did not like her to make

acquaintance with the children who lived on the same stairs with them, because they were a rude, badly brought up set, who would have taught her naughty words and ways. Nor did she like her to go out into the street by herself. So Susie had a dull life of it; nor was her mother able always to give her such food and nourishment as her weak state of health required. But the child was patient and uncomplaining, and spent day after day in her attic room doing such little jobs as her mother left for her, and singing hymns she had learned at a Sunday school she attended before she was ill.

Now Scrags was a very sociable little fellow, and found it dull work on the days when his master went out without him. It was not so bad for him as for Susie, because he had always one resource she had not. He could curl himself up like a round ball and sleep for hours together; whereas Susie's naps were short and far between. Still Scrags could not be asleep always, and being of a very inquisitive disposition, he used to go peeping about outside the door whenever he had the chance; but this was not often, because Dobson used

generally to lock his door when he went out in the morning.

But it so happened that one day he by accident left the door ajar. He had gone out only to buy something, but was detained a long time. He knew, however, that Scrags would take good care of his room, and guard it against intruders, who were very unlikely to appear, for there was nothing to attract idlers up to the top of that high stair.

When Scrags saw that the door was left ajar, the first thing he did was to push it farther open with his nose and peep out; secondly, he passed out on to the landing; and thirdly, he made instantly for the opposite door, which was also ajar, and which he took the liberty of pushing open with his nose as he had done the other one.

Susie was sitting by a little table knitting. She started when Scrags peeped in, and was half afraid; but when, after surveying the room, and seeing only Susie there, he came wriggling towards her, asking to be noticed, her fear vanished, and she ventured to pat and caress him.

They soon became excellent friends; but

Scrags wanted to get back again to his room, feeling, no doubt, that he was in charge of it. So he went to the door, looking back at Susie as if to invite her to follow. Too pleased with her new acquaintance to wish to lose sight of him, she went with him to his own door. Farther she dared not venture, though Scrags did his best to entice her in.

When Dobson returned, he found them both on the landing sitting close together.

Susie looked wistfully at Scrags as Dobson called him to come in. She was so small, and pale, and thin, that the old man felt almost sorry to shut her out by herself. At one time he would never have thought of speaking to her, but now he said :

‘Are you all alone?’

‘Yes, I’m almost always alone,’ she replied.  
‘Mother goes out to char.’

‘Would you like to have the dog to play with you sometimes?’

‘Oh, very much,’ was the reply; ‘please, may he come to me when you go out?’

‘You may come in here now, if you like, and play with him a bit.’

Half timid, half delighted, the child went



**"HE FOUND THEM BOTH ON THE LANDING."**





into Dobson's room, where there were heaps of rags lying waiting to be sorted before they were carried to the paper-mill to be sold.

'Oh, please let me help you,' said Susie, when she saw what Dobson was doing.

He showed her how to sort them; and the child was charmed to be employed, and did it so well that he promised she should come again another day and help him. As for Scrags, he was so pleased at having got Susie in, that his spirits rose, and he was quite troublesome; for he would keep helping, as he supposed, by carrying the bits about from one heap to another, and so mixing linen and calico and woollen pieces together which had been carefully sorted.

When Mrs. Stone came home, she was astonished to find her child quite at home with Scrags and his master.

Dobson felt rather shy at this new state of things. Here he was, actually talking to a neighbour, and feeling a sort of drawing towards her child. He could scarcely understand what he was about, he was so unlike himself.

He had acquired a habit of talking to

Scrags; and that night, as they sat together before the fire, he said, 'Why, Scrags, how fat you are getting; you are not like the same dog; and what's more, *I'm* not like the same man since you came to me. I think I'm growing more sociable like, and it's you have made me so.'

And Scrags looked up into his master's eyes with a look of love and intelligence, as if he wanted to reply, and say:

'Yes, dear master, it's nice to love one another.'

As winter advanced, Dobson sometimes invited Mrs. Stone and Susie to come in and have tea with him, on which occasions Scrags always looked supremely happy.

One night, when everybody in the house was asleep, Mrs. Stone was awakened by a violent scratching at her door, and a short, sharp bark which she knew was Scrags'. On opening it, the dog, in an excited state, seized the bottom of her dress, and tried to pull her forwards. She could scarcely get away from him to strike a light, so great was his anxiety to get her to follow him.

Dobson's door was partly open, and just

inside lay the old man in a fit. He had evidently felt ill, and was going in search of help when he became insensible. In that state he would have lain till morning had not Scrags awakened Mrs. Stone. She aroused a neighbour, and they got him into bed. A medical man was fetched, who did all that could be done for him, and after a time he recovered consciousness. But he never again left his room.

Now he found how dependent we are on one another, and very glad he felt that he had made friends in Mrs. Stone and Susie. The former nursed him night and day till he was able to sit up by the fireside. When it was safe to leave him, she put him into Susie's charge, and very trustworthy the little girl was. She made his breakfast, gave him his medicine, saw to his fire, and did everything she could think of for his comfort. Scrags trotted after her about the room, often hindering, though in his own opinion helping her. At other times he would sit nestled close to the old man's feet, as if trying to help to warm him; for Dobson felt the cold very much. He was gentle and grateful for every attention,

and often said to Mrs. Stone that he wondered what he should have done had not Scrags brought them together.

He had another stroke during the winter, and it was the end. He died so peacefully they scarcely knew which was the last breath.

Scrags would not leave the body for a moment till it was taken away altogether; and for some time he drooped and pined, notwithstanding Mrs. Stone and Susie took him to their room and did all they could to comfort him.

It was found that Dobson had made a will, in which he left everything he had to Mrs. Stone and Susie. Nor was the everything to be despised; for to their surprise they found in his drawer a leather bag containing no less than £84 in bank notes, evidently the savings from the steady industry of many years.

At the end of poor old Dobson's short and simple will, there were these words added:

'I ask Mrs. Stone and Susie to take care of Scrags all his life. Scrags has been a good friend to me.'

So Scrags took up his abode with Susie and her mother, who were enabled by Dobson's bequest to move into much more comfortable rooms, in a better neighbourhood, which greatly improved Susie's health, and Mrs. Stone was able now to send her to school every day. But Scrags was never quite the same dog after his beloved master's death. For some time he pined, and was constantly going to his old room and peeping in, as if with the hope he might have come back; and when he was taken from the neighbourhood, he was still seen sometimes ascending the well-known stairs, and coming down again with a disconsolate air. After a time, however, he attached himself to Mrs. Stone and Susie, and made himself happy with them, though he never seemed so frolicsome as formerly. He died at an advanced age, having effected more good in his life than most dogs have an opportunity of doing.



**A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS TREE.**







### III.

#### A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS TREE.



HERE was a time when Christmas trees were not so common as they are now. Our German friends gave us the idea, and it was hailed in England with alacrity. One of the first was given to the royal children at Windsor, and when the account of it appeared in the *Court Journal*, it sounded as if to those young scions of royalty and nobility the days of the Arabian nights had returned in all their glory.

Great, then, was the delight of my brother

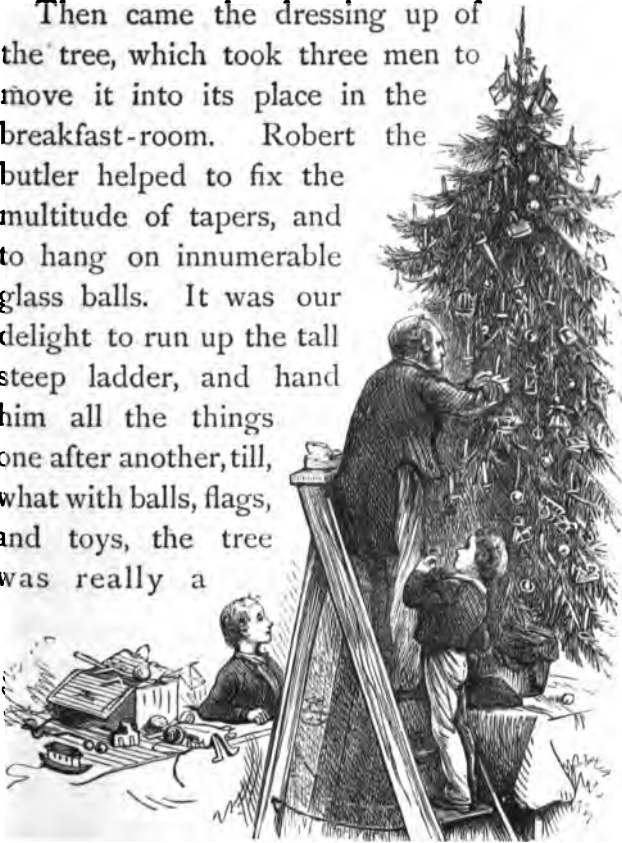
and sister and myself, when my mother told us that she proposed having a Christmas tree, and that we might invite as many of our young friends as we liked.

We lived in London then. My father, Mr. Villiers, was a barrister, and had a house in Chester Square. The tree was to shine forth in all its brilliancy on his birthday, the 5th of January, and we always celebrated it by some special entertainment.

Those who read this little story will doubtless know how great a pleasure to youngsters is all the preliminary business of a Christmas tree; so I need not too minutely describe our visit to the nursery grounds in search of a tall, well-grown fir tree, which arrived the next day, planted in an enormous green tub. Still more interesting was our expedition to the Soho Bazaar and various shops to purchase toys of every description. The carriage was so filled with them that many had to be sent home after us that day; yet still there was an insufficient number of presents for all our expected guests, and other bazaars and other shops had to be rifled for fresh supplies. Both our parents entered

with spirit into these, to us, most important affairs; and Aunt Gertrude, my mother's youngest sister, was asked to come on a visit, because she was so clever and useful, and so very good-natured.

Then came the dressing up of the tree, which took three men to move it into its place in the breakfast-room. Robert the butler helped to fix the multitude of tapers, and to hang on innumerable glass balls. It was our delight to run up the tall steep ladder, and hand him all the things one after another, till, what with balls, flags, and toys, the tree was really a



beautiful sight even without the tapers being lighted. On the floor around the bottom of the tree were laid some large parcels containing shawls, dresses, etc., intended as presents to some of the servants.

I have forgotten to say that I had only one brother and one sister. I was the eldest, being nearly eleven years of age at this time. Tom was about seven, and Alice four. Tom was a confiding, affectionate little fellow, who never left my side when I was at home. He thought his brother Harry perfection, and would have doubled his small fists and fought any one who found fault with me, I believe.

When the dressing up of the tree was completed, the door of the room was shut and the key turned on the outside, and we were strictly forbidden to enter the room again till the next evening. I had previously entreated Robert just to light a few of the tapers for Tom's and my private edification. But he shook his head.

‘No, Master Harry,’ he said. ‘I’ve touched all the tapers with spirits of wine that they may light in a moment, and I can’t do it.

You must have patience till to-morrow evening.'

'But just one or two, Robert,' I pleaded ;  
'that would not spoil the tree a bit.'

'No, Master Harry; your mamma has given orders that it's not to be touched again, and she must be obeyed. So now, young gentlemen, you must please be off, and I'll shut up the room.'

Robert was an excellent servant, and devotedly attached to us all. He had lived many years in my father's family, and was growing old; but he was still active, and would do anything for us children as a general thing. He would, however, never encourage us in the slightest act of disobedience; so, knowing it was useless to persist in my entreaties, I said nothing. There was plenty to be done all the rest of that evening; for about fifty guests had been invited for the following day, and other amusements had to be arranged. Aunt Gertrude wrote out a paper in a bold, clear hand as a sort of programme of all that was to be done, and in the middle of it she printed the words 'Christmas Tree,' in letters twice the size of all the rest.

Neither Tom nor I could get to sleep that night. We heard the staircase clock strike ten, eleven, twelve. Still we were talking to each other in a state of high excitement about the next evening, and above all, the Christmas tree. I had good private reasons of my own for thinking that on one of the branches, in a little wash-leather bag, a silver watch hung on which my name was marked. I revealed my suspicions to Tom, who in his turn confided to me that he believed a certain pair of skates which dangled from a lower branch were intended for him, as our father had promised him a pair this winter. All became perfectly still throughout the house. Even my father, who was generally up the last, had passed our room door on his way to bed.

‘Don’t you think we had better not talk any more, but try to go to sleep, Harry?’ said wise little Tom at last.

‘No, Tom,’ I replied; ‘I’m as wide awake as ever. I can’t help thinking what a glorious jolly sight the tree will be. It was very cross of Robert, not just to let us see one or two of the tapers lighted up.’

Tom made no reply. I lay still for some minutes. Then a sudden thought struck me. It was a very wrong one, and ought to have been put aside at once; but instead of that I encouraged it, till at last I quite writhed about in my bed with the excitement of it.

‘Tom!’ I exclaimed. ‘I’ve something so jolly to say to you.’

The reply was so smothered and sleepy that I thought it was desirable to shy my pillow at his head, for his bed was at a little distance from mine.

It took effect, for the little fellow asked what I wanted in rather a louder voice than before.

‘I say, Tom, I’ve such a lark to propose.’

‘Have you?’ was the sleepy answer, but there was an absence of all curiosity in the tone.

‘Don’t go to sleep, Tom; it’s so babyish. Keep awake. Sit up in bed and listen to me.’

‘I can hear you, Harry, without sitting up,’ said poor, tired Tom.

I knew he would fall asleep in a moment unless I took summary means to prevent it; so I jumped out of bed, and fumbled about



for a match-box that stood on the mantel-piece. Having lighted the candle, I held it close to Tom's eyes, giving him a not very gentle shake at the same time. The child winked and blinked so that I burst out laughing.

'Now, then,' I said, 'I'll tell you what we'll do. Everybody is gone to bed, so you and I will go softly down-stairs to the breakfast-room, and light a few of the tapers on the tree, and see how they will make the glass balls shine. We will put them out again directly. Nobody will know anything about it, and it will do no harm, and be fine fun.'

'But,' said Tom, whom the audacity of the scheme had now fully awakened, 'don't you remember, Harry, that papa and mamma forbade our going into that room all day? We are to go in with all the rest when it is quite lighted up.'

My little brother's simple way of showing me that what I proposed doing was wrong and disobedient staggered me for a moment, for I shrank from directly leading him into doing what our parents had forbidden. Yet the desire to carry out my projected lark grew

stronger every instant. So I turned about in my mind how to put aside Tom's scruples with some show of reason. There is always an evil spirit at hand ready to assist man, woman, or child out of a difficulty of this sort if they stoop so low as to listen to him.

'Yes, Tom,' said I, 'I know we were ordered not to go into the room all *day*, but they said nothing about the *night*.'

Tom looked up at me with a very puzzled look in his eyes. He was too sleepy and too much of a child to be able to argue the question, though he was evidently not satisfied altogether. He was, however, accustomed to look up to me, and trust everything I did, so only said resignedly :

'I'll go, if you really want me to, Tom.'

'If I really want you to,' said I. 'Just as if you would not like the lark quite as much as I shall! Come, jump up, and put on your slippers and jacket. Look sharp.'

Tom did as I bid him, but so slowly that I was ready long before he was, and I grew impatient. He was ready at length, and I led the way with the candle, opening the door very softly, for our room was very near the

one in which our little sister and the nurse slept. The staircase looked very dark and gloomy now that all the gas lamps were put out. Our one candle only seemed to make darkness visible.

Poor little Tom shivered and kept close to me. His heart was not at all in the adventure, and he was longing to go back to bed. I knew he liked to be thought a brave boy, so I said :

‘Surely you are not frightened, Tom ? you must not turn coward.’

‘I’m not exactly frightened,’ he said ; ‘but everything looks so dark, and it is very cold.’

We went down two flights of stairs ; then pushing open a red baize door, we came to the hall where was the breakfast-room. It was locked, but the key was in it, and turned easily.

There stood the tall tree, looking very gigantic by our glimmering light.

‘Now, Tom,’ I said, ‘you hold the candle whilst I light some of the tapers. I think the top ones will look the prettiest.’

‘But how will you reach them ?’ asked Tom.

‘I’ll do it,’ said I; ‘I know what I am about.’ I had seen Robert tie a taper to a very long stick and put it into the corner near the tree ready for use. I lighted it by the candle, and then proceeded to touch some of the top tapers. They ignited directly, and looked so pretty that I could not resist lighting a few more. I did not intend them to burn more than a few seconds, lest Robert should discover what I had done; but to my dismay, I remembered I was not nearly tall enough to blow them out even standing on a chair. The tall step-ladder had been taken away!

I blew and puffed with all my might, but in vain. The tapers burnt steadily downwards. I saw there was nothing for it but to let them burn themselves out.

‘No one will find out that those few are gone, I daresay,’ I said; ‘but it was very stupid of me to light the top tapers instead of the lower ones. I forgot all about putting them out.’ At that moment we both heard a slight noise, whether from the hall or one of the rooms we could not tell. My guilty conscience made me fly out of the room,

pulling Tom with me. I just stopped to close the door, and then we flew like the wind across the large hall, through the red baize door, and up the two flights of stairs leading to our room. Right glad was I to find ourselves inside it again, and equally glad was my poor trembling little brother to snuggle back into his bed. He was fast asleep in three minutes. I lay awake thinking over our adventure, and coming to the conclusion that after all it had not been worth the trouble and fright we had had. Moreover, I felt a little uneasy on two points. One was whether Robert would notice that these tapers had been burnt when he began to light up the tree, and the other was whether they would burn themselves neatly down into their little tin sockets. I don't think I exactly feared danger, but I wished I could have seen them safely blown out before we ran away.

At length I fell asleep; and the next thing I remember was dreaming that Robert's hand was on my shoulder, and that he was asking me indignantly why I had disobeyed orders and gone into the room. He said he must take me to my father. I struggled to get

away from his grasp with such energy that I awoke, and found not Robert's hand but my Aunt Gertrude's was shaking me. She was in a pink dressing-gown, with a lamp in her hand, and looking very pale.

'Wake up, wake up, Harry!' she was saying; 'you must not lose a minute. The house is on fire; dress quickly.'

Then springing to Tom's bed, she tried to arouse the child out of his deep sleep. He sat up and rubbed his eyes; but though he scrambled out of bed and into his clothes as desired, he said something about its being hard to have to get up a second time in one night. Fortunately for me, Aunt Gertrude was too intent on getting us dressed to pay any attention to what he said.

We hurried down the front stairs, where the scene had completely changed since Tom and I had stolen down in darkness not very long before. The gas was lighted now, and the servants were rushing about only partly dressed. We met the nurse running downstairs with Alice in her arms, and my father was hastening towards our room.

'I have been to the boys' room,' said

Aunt Gertrude; 'here they are, safe and sound.'

There was a strong smell of fire, and the hall was filling with smoke rapidly.

'The fire has begun in the breakfast-room,' said my father; 'the engine will soon be here, I trust. Robert and the men are trying to stop it from spreading, and I will go and help now all are awoke. Go over the way to the Denmans', Gertrude; I have taken your aunt there, but she will be miserable till you all join her.'

'The fire has begun in the breakfast-room!'  
Oh, how those words of my father's fell like a weight of heavy lead on my conscience! Till that moment it had not occurred to me, in the midst of all the bustle and confusion, that I had been the cause of the fire. Now I thought of the tapers I had left burning, and could not doubt how it had originated. The breakfast-room was all in flames. Policemen were shouting and keeping off a crowd of people who had assembled in front of the house, but who quickly divided as the fire-engine came dashing up with several firemen in helmets seated round it.

The plate and some valuable papers had already been carried out of the house, and they were taking down the pictures in the dining-room. It was a never-to-be-forgotten scene of terror and confusion.

And *I* had caused it all!

Mercifully there was plenty of water close at hand, and the engines worked well; so the fire was soon got under, and in the course of an hour or two was extinguished, though not, of course, till a great deal of damage had been done to the house. The breakfast-room and furniture were entirely destroyed; and as for the poor Christmas tree and all its beautiful presents, and balls and flags, not even the ashes were to be seen!

Our kind friends the Denmans insisted on our remaining at their house till after breakfast. Of course conversation turned on the fire and what had caused it. It seemed most mysterious how it should have begun in a room where there had been neither fire nor candle for some hours, and which no one had entered since Robert had turned the key in the lock.

Robert was sent for as being the person who had first given the alarm.



‘This is how it was, sir,’ said he, in answer to my father’s question as to how he discovered the fire. ‘I went my rounds as usual and saw that all the lights were put out, and the doors and shutters safe. I just looked into the breakfast-room to see that all was right there. There was not the least smell of smoke then; and no one had been into the room, I am sure, for I had closed the shutters there myself before coming out. I went to bed, and had been asleep some time, when I was awakened by some noise, as I thought. I fancied a door shut in the hall, so I opened my door and listened, but all was quite quiet; so I supposed I had been dreaming, and went back to bed. I believe I fell asleep again very soon, but the next thing I remember is being awakened a second time by a smell of fire. I hurried on my clothes and ran into the hall, which I found filled with smoke. I first opened the dining-room door, but all was clear there. Then I ran to the study, as I knew my master often left a good fire there when he went to bed. Lastly, I flew to the breakfast-room, and found it not only filled with a dense volume of smoke, but



"THE FLAMES BURST FORTH."



flames burst forth as soon as the door opened. I gave the alarm, and the rest you know. How the fire could have begun there is a great mystery, and I am afraid it will remain so.'

The reader may imagine what my feelings had been all through Robert's narration, and how great was my sense of guilt. I longed to confess what I had done, yet had not the courage to do so. I was glad that Tom was up-stairs at breakfast in the nursery, and had not heard what Robert had been saying, or he would have guessed how the disaster had been caused; for there could be no doubt that the tapers had set fire either to the branch of the tree or to some of the articles upon it.

'And you think no one had gone into that room after you closed it?' asked my father.

'I think not, sir. To the best of my belief everything was perfectly right there when I went to bed, and it is not likely any one entered it afterwards.'

'Did you find the door locked as you left it,' asked my father, 'when you went in and discovered the fire?'

'I cannot say, sir, whether it was so or not.

I was in such a state of alarm when I rushed in, that I have no recollection whether I unlocked the door or whether I found it so, but I have very little doubt that the key was turned.'

My heart had been beating very fast during the last part of this conversation. I knew that in my hasty retreat I had not stopped to turn the key in the lock ; but Robert's own words had relieved me. No one need ever know, I saw, that the tapers had been lighted. Suspicion was not likely to turn on me, as I had gone to bed at my usual time. I knew that if I desired Tom never to mention a word about our frolic, he would be silent as the grave.

I argued to myself that it could do nobody any good to know the origin of the fire. I had heard it said that the house and furniture were insured. My confession would not undo what had happened, and would only add to my parents' vexation. No one would get blamed on my account, so I would let the affair rest as it was.

Back word was of course sent to all our invited guests, and thus ended all the joyful

anticipations of the Christmas tree to above fifty little people besides ourselves. But no one was to be pitied so much as myself. The rest of that day I was most miserable. I felt mean and despicable. I longed to get away from everybody, and yet I could not bear to be alone. Tom and Alice were sent to a friend's house for a few days, but I begged to be allowed to stay at home. My mother noticed my dejection, and thought I was suffering from over excitement and loss of sleep. She advised me to go to bed early, and reminded me not to forget to return thanks when I said my prayers for the merciful escape we had had from a far worse fire than this had proved to be. To bed I went, but not to sleep. I was too unhappy. I had been taught to despise cowardice, and I had always prided myself on being brave and truthful; but how had I fallen! Here I was, acting, if not actually telling, a falsehood, because I had not the moral courage to own that I had caused the fire by my disobedience. At length my mind was made up. I would go and tell my father everything before I slept. I knew I should find him in his dressing-room, for I had heard

him give orders for a fire to be lighted there as his study smelt so strongly of smoke, and he had letters to write which would keep him up late. So I dressed myself and went and tapped at his door.

He looked up from his desk at me in surprise.

‘Why, Harry, my lad,’ he exclaimed, ‘I thought you had been fast asleep for three hours!’

I went up to the side of his chair.

‘Father,’ said I, ‘I have something to tell you. It will make you very angry, but I would rather not hide it from you any longer.’

‘Speak out, my boy, then,’ said my father. ‘If you have done wrong, own it like a man.’

He held out his hand to me. I grasped tight hold of it, and instantly felt that I could say anything now.

‘Father,’ I exclaimed, ‘it was *I* who was the cause of the fire. I went down with Tom after everybody was in bed, and lighted some of the Christmas-tree tapers. I made Tom go with me. He did not want to, and reminded me we had been forbidden to go into the breakfast-room; but I would take him, and I

persuaded him there was no harm in it. I lighted some of the top tapers ; but we heard a noise, and ran away, leaving them lighted, so the tree must have caught fire.'

My father listened to me with a sorrowful rather than an angry countenance. He did not speak for a moment or two. The silence was terrible to me, for I saw how grieved he was ; at last I said :

'Father, will you forgive me ? Give me the severest punishment you can think of, but do forgive me.'

'My boy,' he said, 'I freely forgive you, for I know what it must have cost you to come and tell me all this. I only wish you had had the courage to speak out when we were wondering how the fire began. Without doubt, the tapers set fire to the tree when they burnt low down, as there was no one there to extinguish them. The consequences have indeed been most disastrous. But your fault, Harry, was that of disobedience, and of leading your little brother into it. Had no fire occurred, your sin would have remained the same.'

'And what punishment will you give me,



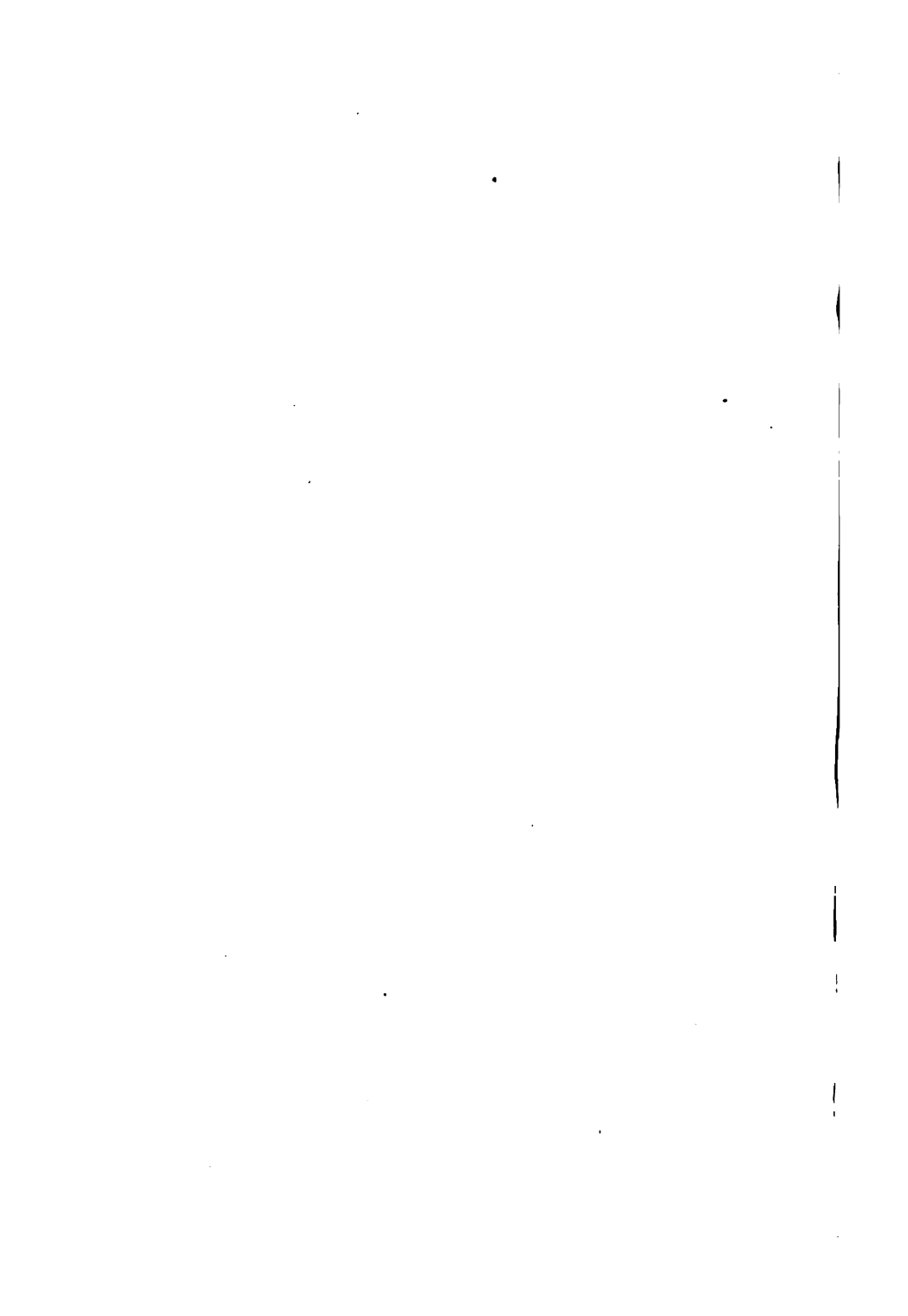
father?' I asked, rather longing in my heart for one, that I might have an opportunity of showing my contrition.

'The only punishment you will have, Harry, will be that of telling others what you have told me. It would not be right to leave the origin of the fire in mystery. It will be painful to you, I know, but do it manfully, frankly expressing your sorrow; and if this proves a life-long lesson to you, I shall scarcely regret the destruction of my breakfast-room and all its furniture. Now go back to bed, my boy, and to sleep, for you need rest after being up nearly all last night.'

Thus ended the history of our first and ever-memorable Christmas tree!



**THE BRUSSELS KNIFE-GRINDER.**





#### IV.

### THE BRUSSELS KNIFE-GRINDER.



THE scene of the following little tale lies in Brussels; and for the benefit of such readers as

are strangers to that city, we will say a few descriptive words. Brussels is divided into two towns, the upper and the lower. The former

is almost exclusively the abode of the higher classes of society, and much resembles Paris on a small scale. It boasts of streets as wide, of shops as gay, of boulevards as pleasant, and equipages as brilliant as any in the French capital. But Lower Brussels presents a different picture. The stranger who has been pacing the fashionable promenades above, where the houses are like palaces, and amusement and pleasure seem the order of the day, finds a striking contrast when he descends the hill, and finds himself amidst narrow streets, dark and muddy in winter, close and hot in summer; surrounded by a dense population, bustling and eager in the pursuit of business, and deafened by the din and noise of crowded thoroughfares. Yet the lover of the picturesque will find his taste far more gratified than in the straight, evenly-built mansions of the higher portion of the city. Here, in front of the beautiful Hotel de Ville, on market days will be seen multitudes of peasants, dressed in a variety of costumes and colours, offering their commodities for sale. Booths stand side by side filled with every description of nicknacks, such as looking-glasses in curious frames,

rosaries, coloured slippers, fans, articles carved in wood, cakes, bon-bons, etc. Flower merchants stand near their lovely groups of exotics, which scent the air with delicious fragrance, and delight the eye with their wealth of bloom.

Passing on from this lively spot, what may be called the lowest part of the lower town is reached. Here the narrow streets become still narrower. Houses are of such a height that they appear to meet at the top; they are black with the smoke of ages, and in some parts are crumbling away. The windows are so small as scarcely to deserve the name, being mere slits, mostly filled up with rags and paper, or where there is glass it is sure to be dirty and cracked. Pale, careworn faces are seen there, bending over the needle, with which some already well-patched garment is being repaired; or thin, bony fingers carve figures or flowers in wood, for which a mere trifle is given by the shopkeeper, who grows rich at the expense of those who must be willing to take what is offered, however small, or go away to starve. On the doorsteps of these abodes sprawl screaming infants,

whose mothers have no time to attend to them. Others, a little older, go up and down the streets watching for opportunities of begging or stealing; whilst those who are more advanced in years find their way into the upper town as a more hopeful sphere for those occupations than the poverty-stricken regions of their homes.

. . . . .

We must now go back many years from the present day, and take our reader to a small abode in the lower, though not the lowest part of this same city of Brussels.

Here lived a worthy couple, by name Lisa and Lubeck Voss. In those times, as now, a good many Flemish people inhabited this part of the town, and Voss and his wife had left Flanders to try their fortunes in Brussels, bringing with them an only child, Wilhelm by name.

Voss had followed the trade of a cutler from his youth; but he was a man given to love change, and had a longing to see something of the world beyond his own native place, a small, dull town where there was little to be done.

He had heard much of the fine city of Brussels, and like many another respectable countryman, imagined he should be able to do much better for himself and family by removing to a larger sphere of action. So having without difficulty talked his wife Lisa into the same belief, they migrated, and established themselves in the abode we have mentioned.

Voss and his wife were somewhat superior to the generality of the persons amongst whom they had located themselves, both being tolerably well educated for their position in life. The Flemish people are generally clean and orderly in their houses and habits, and Lisa Voss was no exception to her countrywomen in this respect. She was very careful of her little boy, whom she would not allow to run wild about the streets with the multitude of children that surrounded them; and she instructed him in the art of reading and writing herself, for schools for the lower orders were much less common in those days than they are at present. She and her husband had not much intercourse with their neighbours; but this exclusiveness did not arise from pride, so much as from feeling



that they had little or no congeniality of character with those amongst whom their limited means compelled them to dwell, for house rents were very dear in the better parts of the town.

Voss carried on his trade as a cutler, and he also took to wood-carving of an evening; and as his hand was a skilful one, he contrived to earn a good deal in this way, and between the two employments to maintain himself and family in tolerable comfort.

As their boy Wilhelm grew older, it became, of course, a matter of consideration what should be done with him. The lad himself wanted to be a wood-carver, but his father said it would be too uncertain a way of getting a living, and discouraged the idea. He had a prejudice in favour of his old trade of cutlery and knife-grinding. It so happened that he possessed a very good machine on wheels for grinding scissors and knives, which he had brought with him from Flanders. It had been the custom in Brussels for all such articles to be sent to the shops to be sharpened, and it struck the good man that it would be very convenient to the people generally if some

one were to go about from street to street with a machine, and so enable them to have the grinding done at their very doors. Wilhelm was now strong enough to work the machine easily; so his father thought he might earn a good deal in this way when once he became known, and had established the habit of going regularly from place to place.

Wilhelm did not dislike the idea, and Lisa thought it would be good for him to be constantly in the open air, as he had never been very strong. So he started one fine morning, pushing his machine before him. At first his cry of 'Knives to grind,' 'Scissors to grind,' caused amusement, and even ridicule; but he persevered, and it proved to be a case of—'Let those laugh who win.' Very soon the sound of his voice reminded the good wives and mothers that their scissors were getting blunt, and that it was much quicker and more convenient to run out and give them to the boy-grinder, who did them both well and reasonably, than to have the trouble of taking them to a shop, where they would perhaps not be attended to for several days. Milliners and

mantua-makers took to the plan directly. The domestics in private houses watched for him as he went on his rounds. Wilhelm obtained plenty of employment, and came to be quite an object of interest when the 'whirr—whirr' of his machine was heard; for a little crowd of children was sure to assemble round him, and even older people would stop to watch his operations.

Wilhelm did not go about alone. He was always accompanied by an intelligent dog, that sat by his side, and guarded the machine like a dragon whilst his master was away delivering the knives and scissors to their respective owners.

Fretta, as he was called, was rather an important member of the Voss family. They had reared him from a puppy. The love between Wilhelm and Fretta was very great.

It was then, as it is now, the custom to make dogs beasts of burden in Belgium, and oblige them to draw light vehicles. Wilhelm was constantly told that he was very foolish for drawing about his machine himself, when he had a dog that could do it for him. But he always replied that he was

more able to do it than Fretta, and that he should not like to see him always harnessed, and dragging what would be too heavy for him. He would not be talked out of his arrangements, however much he was laughed at.

The lad had a kind, tender heart, and would far rather over-fatigue himself than suffer Fretta to be so.

Amongst the churches in Brussels is one called 'Notre Dame de la Chapelle,' which is surmounted by a tower; and on the top of this tower it was the custom of the city to employ a sentinel, whose business it was to keep a constant, vigilant watch in case fire should break out in any direction, north, south, east, or west, in which case he was to give the alarm by sounding a trumpet loudly and pointing a flag in the direction. Immediately the engine and firemen proceeded without a moment's loss of time to the scene of action.

One evening Wilhelm was slowly returning home from his rounds. He had had rather a lonely day; for his constant companion Fretta had been slightly lamed the evening before by

a stone thrown at him by a mischievous boy, and Wilhelm had consequently left him at home for a day's rest. He was passing near the church we have mentioned, when suddenly his attention was arrested by the sound of a trumpet overhead, and looking up he saw the sentinel's flag pointed in the direction whither he was going. In an instant the greatest excitement prevailed. 'Au feu, au feu!' was the cry echoed from mouth to mouth.

Windows were thrown open, people flew out of their houses, and crowds hurried off in the direction pointed at by the flag, whilst still the shrill notes of the trumpet continued their ominous blast. Then came the clatter of the fire-engines down the steep street which divides the upper from the lower part of the city. The crowd divided right and left to allow them to pass, and then closed up again, pressing forwards, partly in awe, partly in curiosity, to ascertain what was likely to be the extent of the conflagration.

Wilhelm went slowly because of his grinding machine. Indeed it was in such danger of being broken by the pressure of the crowd,

that he turned into an entry at the side of the street in order to wait till the first rush was over. The shopman to whom the entry belonged was standing at his door, and offered to let it stand higher up within his premises, where it would be quite safe.

Wilhelm thankfully accepted the offer, and then hastened off. He had hitherto felt no particular alarm about his parents, not being aware that the fire had broken out in the very street in which they lived ; but as he went onwards and heard its name mentioned as the place in which it was burning, he became terrified.

The smell of smoke grew strong as he approached, and a red lurid light illuminated the sky. His fears amounted to agony when, after much pushing and struggling to make his way through the crowd, he at length came in full view of the burning houses, and saw—oh, poor Wilhelm ! he saw his own home was one bright mass of flames, together with those on either side of it. At the very moment he arrived the firemen were carrying out his father's body. He had died in his efforts to rescue his wife, who had not been

well that day, and had probably gone up-stairs to lie down and get some sleep, and was doubtless suffocated by the smoke. Her husband had apparently been killed by a beam or heavy weight falling on his head. He was from home when the fire broke out, and had returned to find it in flames, and doubtless knew that his wife was up-stairs on her bed.

It was never known whether the fire originated in that house or another. A dog was heard barking violently a short time before inside Voss' house. This was probably poor Fretta trying to give the alarm to his sleeping mistress up-stairs. Of the faithful dog no more was heard. He too must have perished.

Poor Wilhelm was as one frantic when he heard that the firemen had endeavoured in vain to save his mother. He tried to rush into the burning, falling house, and would have done so and thus lost his own life without saving hers, had he not been held forcibly back. Once he escaped and again made a frenzied dart at the house, but a falling timber acted a friendly part by striking him so

violently on the knee that he was knocked down and considerably hurt, though scarcely aware of it at the time. Five minutes later the whole house fell, together with several others, making a huge bonfire. Above the noise of the crash they made in falling, arose a bitter cry of 'My mother, my father! oh, my father and mother!'

It was not till morning that the last smouldering of the fire was extinguished. Nearly one side of the street was destroyed. Many families had lost homes, and furniture, and clothes, and knew not where to turn for shelter. But our chief interest lies with poor Wilhelm, than whom a more desolate youth could scarcely have been found on the face of the earth. Not even Fretta remained to him! The neighbours had saved a few, but very few things from his house. A table, three or four chairs, his own bed, which had been on the ground-floor, and one or two other articles alone remained to him of his former happy home.

These were collected together by a neighbour, who bade him keep watch by them; for dishonesty lurks abroad even at such times,



and scruples not to render misfortune and desolation greater still by its heartless thievings.

So the sun rose on that sad morning, and brought into view of those who still lingered in the neighbourhood, the figure of a lad who, with his head resting on his hands, was weeping bitterly.

At length a tap on the shoulder made him look up. An old man in a clerical dress stood by him. That part of the parish was his charge, and he had known Wilhelm's parents. He recognised their son, and his heart was moved with deep pity.

'This is a hard trial for you, my poor boy,' he said; 'but God will not forsake you. He will raise you up friends who will care for you.'

'But I can never have my parents back again,' exclaimed Wilhelm. 'I am all alone in the world, no one, no one left;' and he broke afresh into an agony of weeping.

'The Lord has indeed laid His hand heavily on you,' said the good man; 'but He who wounds can heal in His own time. Thick and dark as the clouds hang over your

head now, He can and will bring sunshine after a while.'

'Never to me,' said Wilhelm; 'I wish I were dead too.'

'Nay, nay, say not so, lad,' exclaimed a new voice. 'Our good father here speaks truly when he says God can send sunshine again some day.'

The speaker was a pleasant-looking, middle-aged woman well known to Lisa Voss. She kept a little shop of various kinds of goods constantly required by housekeepers, and it was through such purchases their acquaintance had first arisen.

'We must think what the lad is to do, Madame Andrea,' said the curé. 'He cannot stay here. An asylum is sure to be opened for the sufferers of the fire. I will make inquiries.'

'You shall come home with me,' said Madame Andrea. 'I have two rooms which I let to lodgers, and they are empty now. Bring your goods, such as are left you, and you can stay with me, at all events for the present. You shall be right welcome.'

'There,' said the curé, 'you see that

already God is showing care for you. You cannot do better than accept this good woman's proposal.'

So with a sad heart and weary step, Wilhelm carried his few things to Madame Andrea's house. Thither too he wheeled his grinding machine, by the means of which he hoped to be able to support himself. Madame Andrea was a single woman, very busy and bustling, but thoroughly kind-hearted and generous in feeling.

Wilhelm could not have fallen into better hands. She felt the deepest pity for him, and did her utmost to comfort him. For several days the poor lad really required care and nursing; for his knee was painful, and the terrible shock to his nerves brought on a severe feverish attack. When he got better he proposed to go and find a room for himself, but Madame Andrea said, 'No;' that if he liked to stay with her, he should occupy one of her rooms, and pay for it what he could afford, and as for his food, why, he must buy what he could and she would cook it for him.

'I am a lone woman,' she said to him,

‘and you are left lonely too. I am getting on in life, and shall be glad to have you with me. I will be as a mother to you, and when I grow old you must look after me.’

So it was settled, and Wilhelm thus found a home. He continued his old trade of knife-grinding, by which he could earn sufficient to support himself and pay a fair price to Madame Andrea for his room.

His cry of ‘Knives to grind’ was heard as before in the streets, but the tone was more plaintive than formerly. No Fretta now ran by his side or guarded the machine. He was offered another dog by more than one person who remembered poor Fretta, but Wilhelm shook his head. He preferred being without one now his faithful friend was gone. He could not transfer his affections to another. Besides, he felt he had no right to intrude a dog on Madame Andrea, who was the tidiest of tidy spinsters, and could not bear to see a speck of dirt in her house.

Wilhelm was a lad of very deep feelings though reserved in manner. He had been such a tenderly loved son, and so happy in his home, that he had never sought acquaint-

ances of his own age. Now he sometimes felt as if the sense of his loneliness was almost insupportable.

Madame Andrea, though very kind, was not like the gentle mother he had lost. She was too bustling and restless a person to win strong affection from him, though his heart yearned after something to love, and to feel sympathy with him.

The good old curé used sometimes to come and call of an evening, after the day's work was over. He lent him books and talked kindly to Wilhelm. The lad liked to see him, because he had known his parents.

One pleasure he had, and it was a great one to him. He had always been in the habit of feeding the little birds in the park when his rounds led him in that direction. He used to fill his pockets with crumbs and bits of bread, and the little feathered creatures had grown to look for him, and to flutter about with pleasure when he approached. He had that strong influence over them which people who are of a tender, loving spirit towards dumb animals are sometimes known to possess in a remarkable degree.

They came flying towards him in numbers, hopped about his feet, and one or two bolder than the rest would even alight upon his shoulder, and receive crumbs from his hand. The little gaily-dressed children who walked in the park with their nurses used to hail the sight of the young knife-grinder, knowing that he would be sure to feed his favourites. In vain they tried by the power of crumbs and cake to allure them to the same amount of tameness. The poor, shabbily-clad youth, with his pale, sorrowful face, possessed a charm for them to which no one else could aspire.

‘Why are all the birds so fond of you?’ asked a merry little girl after watching him with them for some time; ‘why won’t they come to me as they do to you when I bring them crumbs?’

‘Ah, mademoiselle,’ replied he, ‘perhaps they know you have a father and mother to love you, whilst I have no one but them to be glad to see me.’

One day after Wilhelm had been throwing crumbs to his birds, and was returning to his machine, which he had left at the

gate of the park, he was stopped by a little ragged girl of about six years old, whose sweet face looked piteously in his as she said :

‘Please give Elise some bread too, she is so hungry.’

He had given every crumb to the birds, who were still fluttering near, for some of them generally escorted him to the gate, flying from tree to tree as he passed along. He felt sorry he had none to give her, for the child looked pale, and leaned against the gate as if feeling exhausted.

She held out her tiny hand, and said again :  
‘Please give Elise some bread.’

‘I have none left, little girl,’ he replied.  
‘The birds have had it all. Where do you come from? who are your parents?’

‘I’ve only got father,’ said the child, ‘and he’s gone away and left me, and now I’m all alone.’

‘How do you know he will not come back to you?’ asked Wilhelm.

‘He told me so. He said he was going away to another country, and that I was to go out and beg, and then they



"PLEASE GIVE ELISE SOME BREAD."





would take me to a big house and give me food.'

'I know what he meant,' said Wilhelm. 'There is a place they take children to if they have no parents or friends. If you will come with me, I will take you there, and ask them if you may go in.'

Elise did not seem to understand what he meant.

Her only thought at the present moment was how much she wanted something to eat, and she replied by saying :

'I am so hungry !'

'Wait here a moment,' said Wilhelm. He ran off to the nearest bread shop, and bought a large roll, which he gave to the famished little girl, who began to devour it eagerly. A woman passed with a milk-can. He asked her to sell him one of her tin mugs full of milk for the child.

'She looks half-starved,' said the woman as she handed her the milk. 'Nay, I don't want your money, man,' she added, as he offered her some coppers. 'Put them back in your pocket. I don't grudge her a drop of milk.'

Comforted and refreshed by the roll and milk, Elise ran up to Wilhelm, and put her hand in his. 'May I come with you?' she said; 'don't leave me alone again.'

'I will take you to that big house I told you of,' said Wilhelm; 'they will take care of you there.'

The child's lip quivered, and she grasped his hand tighter.

'I don't want to go there,' she said; 'I want to stay with you.'

That clinging of the little hand to his sent a thrill through the lonely lad's heart. He was hungering for affection, and felt how very dearly he could love this small child, who was, like himself, alone in the wide world.

'I have no home of my own, Elise,' he said sadly, 'so I cannot let you stay with me.'

But Elise only took his hand in both hers, as if resolved not to let him go.

'Come along, then,' he said, 'you *shall* stay with me, if I can manage to keep you. You shall come and be my little sister, and I will take care of you.' He lifted her in his arms

as he spoke, and carried her to the grinding-machine, on which there was a broad slip of wood, large enough for so tiny a child to sit. He placed her on it, saying :

‘Sit there, Elise, and I will give you a ride. I will wheel you to where I live.’

Elise was delighted with the arrangement, and laughed aloud at the fun as he set off at a pretty brisk pace. As he went along, the new and delicious sensation of having some one to care for and to protect, made him feel happier than he had done since he lost his parents. Why should he not have her for his own dear little sister? He would work for her, and be to her what his parents had been to him. He stopped for an instant to settle her more comfortably on her seat, and as he did so the child flung her little arms round his neck, and laid her cheek against his. Wilhelm felt no longer desolate. He thought of the words of the old curé, who had said ‘sunshine would come after a time.’

It seemed to him as if a bright gleam of it had broken forth in the form of this helpless innocent thus thrown on his protection.

But misgivings arose in his mind as to what Madame Andrea would say when he appeared with his newly-found treasure. He remembered all her strict, tidy ways, and that she had not been accustomed to children. He could earn sufficient to pay for her board, he felt sure.

He was not anxious on *this* score; but as he drew near her house, he felt more and more uneasy as to her reception. If necessary, however, he could and would find another lodging, sorry as he should be to leave Madame Andrea. When they arrived he took little Elise by the hand, and led her into the room behind the shop, where Madame was adding up her accounts.

‘Look here, Madame Andrea,’ he said, ‘I have brought another lodger. Will you let this little girl stay here? I have promised her that she shall live with me; I can pay for her, I know, for I get more customers every day.’

Madame Andrea, in amazement, looked at Elise over her spectacles, then at Wilhelm, as if to see whether he were in jest or earnest.

'Is the child a relation of yours?' she asked.

'No,' replied Wilhelm, 'I have no relations in the world, I believe. I found this little girl by the park gate. Her father has forsaken her, and she is left all alone, like me, so I mean to work hard and maintain her.'

Madame Andrea held up her hands in amazement.

'Why, Wilhelm!' she exclaimed, 'are you gone mad? How can you take a child like that to bring up? If she has no friends, there are places for paupers where she would be taken in and looked after well enough.'

'But I want to keep her,' said Wilhelm. 'If you will let her stay here, Madame Andrea, she shall be no expense to you. I will soon earn money enough to pay you well; and at first she shall have half my meals, and I will sleep on the floor, and she can have my bed.'

'And suppose I say I won't be plagued with a child in the house?'

'Then I must look out for another lodging, sorry as I shall be to leave you,' said Wilhelm. 'Indeed I cannot give her up.'

During this conversation the child had kept tight hold of Wilhelm's hand. She seemed to comprehend that there was some difficulty about her remaining with him, for she watched Madame Andrea's face with anxiety. The good woman had, as we know, a truly kind heart, and it melted into feelings of compassion as she looked on the lovely little face before her.

'Come here, child,' she said, holding out her hand. 'Come and tell me all you can about yourself.'

Elise was not troubled with shyness; she took the proffered hand, and allowed Madame to take her on her knee. Like Wilhelm, Madame Andrea felt drawn towards the little one, who had a confiding manner that was very attractive. She questioned her about her father and mother, and where she had lived, and how she came to be left alone. The child gave sufficiently clear answers to most of the questions to enable them to gather from them that they had lived in Rotterdam when her mother was alive; that she had died, and then her father had become unsettled, and took to wandering ways; that

he had come to Brussels, where he met with a woman who was very unkind to Elise. They used to talk about going away to another country, the name of which Elise could not remember; but she often heard the woman say Elise would be in their way, and must be left behind.

One day her father took her to a street a long way off, and told her he was going away and should not come back, but that she was to go about and beg, and then she would be taken to a nice large house, where there would be plenty of other children to play with. He disappeared directly after he had said this. Elise had run after him for a long time, feeling sure she should find him, and that he would come back to look for her; but all day passed whilst she went backwards and forwards seeking him, and she grew very hungry and tired. Then at last when she saw Wilhelm feeding the birds, she asked him to give her some bread also. Such was her sad little tale. It was only too evident that she was indeed forsaken by an unnatural parent.

Tears stood in Madame Andrea's eyes be-



fore the child had finished speaking. She no longer opposed Wilhelm's plan of adopting her. That he would soon find her a great inconvenience she felt sure, but at all events she resolved that she should stay there till some other arrangement could be made. She set to work at once about certain domestic arrangements, even making up a little bed in her own room for the child, and purchasing a few articles of clothing for her at a shop where everything of the sort could be procured.

Elise was so engaging and affectionate, that it was impossible not to love her. Wilhelm was almost jealous of the interest Madame soon felt in the child. He wanted to pay all her expenses himself. Nor had he difficulty in doing so. His resources appeared to increase from the day he first took the young foundling. It seemed as if knives and scissors grew blunt on purpose for him. He found he could pay a regular sum to Madame Andrea for her board, which that good woman took care should be a very moderate one. On Sundays, and in the evenings, he taught Elise to read and write; and as she was very quick

and intelligent, she made rapid progress. In the day-time she used often to go out with Wilhelm, seated on the little seat on his grinding-machine, or trotting by his side. Madame Andrea's prophecy, that he would soon tire of his charge, was not verified. On the contrary, he grew more attached to her daily, and to earn money for her needs gave a zest to his labour far greater than if he had had only himself to think of.

As she grew older, her great delight was to be allowed to imitate Wilhelm in carving bits of wood. He gave her one or two little instruments for the purpose, and very soon she surprised them by the facility with which she produced copies of the figures and flowers put before her.

'Why! the child has a genius for carving,' said the old curé one day when, as was often his custom, he called to see them. 'She will be able to work her own way in the world if she goes on improving thus.'

This remark was made when Elise was about ten years old. She heard it, and though she said nothing, from that moment the idea struck her that she might be able

some day to relieve Wilhelm of the burden of her support. She was a thoughtful, sensible child, and was fully aware that she owed everything to him. Her gratitude was very great also to Madame Andrea, who was quite a mother to her.

About this time Wilhelm put her to a good day school, where she improved in such things as were suitable to her station.

. . . . .  
We must pass over the next eight or nine years, which brought Elise to womanhood, and a very fair, interesting girl she was, gentle and engaging in character as in appearance.

The old curé was right in saying she had a genius for carving. She had persevered, and excelled so greatly that she could command a good price for anything she undertook.

Wilhelm had become a regular cutler like his father before him. Madame Andrea had had some money left her, and as she proposed giving up the shop, Wilhelm opened one for cutlery. So they all lived on in the same house, and it was no small pleasure to Elise

that she was able to bear her share in the general expenses.

A happier family could not have been found in the city.

Business prospered with Wilhelm so greatly that he was able to lay by money, and Elise's name began to be known so well as a delicate and finished carver, that she received private orders from the nobility and others, who paid her well. Wilhelm used to bring her beautiful flowers from the flower-market to copy. Many of her exquisite productions are constantly seen and admired in Belgium by travellers, who can scarcely credit that the wreaths and graceful tendrils which so delight them were the work of a young artist under twenty years of age. Elise was no ordinary girl in many respects.

As Wilhelm firmly and positively refused to take any money from her except a small sum which she insisted on paying for her board, she laid the rest by, hoping that it might some day be of use to him whom she looked on as her benefactor.

Time went on till Elise was twenty-five. Then an event happened which delighted

Madame Andrea's heart. Wilhelm and Elise were married; for notwithstanding the difference in their ages, which was about eleven years, they had that affection for each other which was the best earnest for future happiness.

They moved with Madame Andrea to a larger house in a better situation, where Wilhelm's business as a cutler grew to be more and more extensive. He was soon in a fair way to be a rich man. He always refused to take any of the money Elise earned by her carving for general use. 'We have abundance,' he said, 'for all our needs, and more than enough. Let it lie by till it may be really needed, or to spend as you please.'

They never had any children; but it was a delight to Elise to seek out destitute little ones, and help to place them in comfortable homes. She never forgot that she had herself been rescued from almost starvation, and her heart yearned after doing for others as she had been done by.

Once she heard a sermon on the text, 'Freely ye have received, freely give.' 'I am one of those who have received freely,'

she said to her husband as they walked home.

Not long after this, Wilhelm showed her a house very superior to their own, which he said they could now well afford to take. He was going to be made a burgomaster, and was beginning to be looked on as a citizen of some importance.

‘Do you very much wish to move from our present house?’ asked Elise.

‘No,’ replied Wilhelm, ‘I prefer it to a grander one; it was for your sake I proposed it. We are rich enough now not only to buy that house, but also to keep you a carriage. We have no children, no one to save for; so why should you not live as a lady, in luxury and ease?’

‘I have no desire to turn into a fine lady, dear husband,’ replied Elise; ‘I can never be happier than I am. No; let us remain where we are, unless’—

She hesitated, coloured, and paused.

‘Unless what, my Elise?’ asked her husband; ‘tell me all that is in your heart.’

‘Then,’ said she, ‘I will tell you about something that has been in my mind ever

since I heard that sermon on "Freely ye have received, freely give." No one knows better than you, dear Wilhelm, how I have been cared for ever since you took me, a little forsaken child, and brought me up under the shelter of your affection. Added to all this, God gave me a gift in the power of carving wood which has made me quite rich, as you never would touch the money it has brought. Now, if you do not object, I should like so much to found an orphanage with my earnings. It might be begun with only a few children at first, and increase as time goes on if God prospers it.'

Elise looked anxiously in her husband's face to see what he thought of her scheme, and his answer fully satisfied her.

'I like your idea extremely, Elise,' he said, 'and will aid you in every way in my power. I too have received freely; not only have I been fortunate in business, but God has given you to me to be the sunshine and happiness of my life. Yes, Elise, we will do as you say. Instead of living expensively and spending more upon ourselves, we will devote our money to the purpose you propose, and

as we have received, so will we endeavour to give.'

From that day Elise became a very busy woman, for she lost no time in beginning to carry out the plans on which her heart was set, and in which her husband soon began to take as great an interest as herself. They agreed that it would be wise to commence everything on a small scale at first, and to increase gradually as they saw their way. A small house was taken and furnished with everything necessary for the reception of a few orphans, and a respectable matron was engaged to undertake the care of them.

Very happy was Elise when she first saw the friendless little creatures fast asleep in the cots she had provided for them, and thought of the night when she too had been tucked up in her little bed by the side of kind Mother Andrea on the night of that eventful day when Wilhelm brought her home on his grinding machine.

Every year a few more orphans were added to the number, till a larger house had to be taken; and even that was soon too small to contain the number of destitute children that



petitioned for admission. But Wilhelm was becoming richer each year, and wealth did but enlarge his sympathies, instead of narrowing them, as is too often the case. At length, towards the end of his life, a large and handsome hospital reared its head in Brussels, in which hundreds of orphans have been sheltered and educated, and which is endowed with ample funds bequeathed to it by Wilhelm Voss and his wife Elise.



**MARY RAYMOND'S PROMISE ;**

**OR,**

**A RUNAWAY JOURNEY.**





## V.

### MARY RAYMOND'S PROMISE.



THE sun was sinking behind the range of distant hills that bounded the prospect from the little sitting-room of Henly Vicarage. In the window of that room sat a little girl of about nine years of age, to whom we wish to introduce our readers. She was a bright, intelligent-looking child, with soft brown hair and dove-like eyes, that at the present moment

were looking with great satisfaction on a pair of neatly-mended gentleman's gloves. By her side lay a beautiful black Newfoundland dog, who was watching her every movement, though his eyes were partly shut, as he rested his chin upon his stretched-out front paws. 'There, Bruno,' she exclaimed, 'I've mended the last hole ; but why does not papa come, I wonder ?' The dog sat up and looked out of the window. He understood language quite well enough to know what his little mistress Mary Raymond was alluding to, and he turned his eyes in the same direction as hers.

'How late papa is this evening, Dorothy,' she said to a respectable-looking, motherly woman who at that moment entered the room with the tea-tray in her arms.

'He has been all the way to Newton, you know, Miss Mary,' she replied. 'He will soon be here now.'

As she spoke, Mary jumped up from her chair, and Bruno gave a bark and bounded to the door. 'Here he is,' she cried. 'Now, Bruno, for a race ;' and snatching her hat from a peg in the passage, she ran out of the house and down the road, preceded by

Bruno, who was evidently going to win the race.

They were soon both by the side of a clerically-dressed gentleman.

‘And so Bruno reached me first, Mary. He often takes a mean advantage of his four legs against your two. You should make him give you some yards in advance of him when you run races.’

‘You are late, papa ; Bruno and I have been watching for you ever so long. He and I have been for a nice walk in the wood, and since then I have been mending your gloves ; so you must wear them to-morrow, and let me have these, for I see some holes coming in them.’

‘I hope you are growing fonder, then, of sewing, my little maiden, since you look so sharp after the holes.’

‘No, papa, I don’t like it a bit better, unless it is something I can do for *you*, and then I like it very much.’ Mr. Raymond passed his arm round his child and drew her closer to him, but he sighed as they turned into the garden gate and passed up the gravel walk leading to the house. He still sadly missed

the gentle face that for ten years had ever greeted his return home, but which he would never see there again !

Mr. Raymond was the vicar of Henly, a small, scattered parish lying on the borders of a bleak moor or common, the keen winds of which had proved too severe for his wife's somewhat delicate frame. She had caught a cold the previous winter, which ending in pleurisy had been fatal. Mary was their only child, and had been so little with other children, and so constantly with her parents, that she was thoughtful and old of her age. She was of a warm, enthusiastic temperament, and extremely affectionate, but too impetuous and hasty in temper. When Mrs. Raymond found that she was dying, she talked as much as she was able to her little girl about her future life and duties, trusting much of her conversation would be remembered in after years. She tried to impress her with a sense of what a comfort she might be to her father when she was left alone with him. And when the little girl's first grief on hearing that her mother could not get well had somewhat abated, she listened with an earnestness

beyond her years to her mother's instructions.

'Tell me exactly what I can do for papa,' she asked.

'Nay, that I cannot altogether do, Mary. Many things will arise I cannot foresee in which you may help him. I can only tell you to be on the watch day by day for his comfort. You can be his bright, loving companion in his walks, and of an evening; and should he be ill, you must be his tender, gentle nurse. Will you promise me all this, my child?'

And the way in which Mary replied solemnly: 'Yes, dear mamma, indeed I will,' told Mrs. Raymond that, young as she was, she would be true and faithful to her promise as far as she could.

When all was over, and the bereaved pair were left alone together, Mary turned to her father with a yearning for his love as the only thing to fill the void left in her heart and life now that her mother was gone.

Mr. Raymond's household consisted of only (besides himself and his child) the respectable, middle-aged servant called Dorothy, and a young girl who assisted her in



the domestic work. Dorothy had been Mary's nurse, and was now cook and house-keeper and manager-general ; and very faithfully she fulfilled her duties. She loved her master and Mary with all the attachment so often found in servants who have lived on steadily in one family, sharing its weal and woe, and making its interests his or her own.

And Mary loved Dorothy second only to her father ; and she was so well cared for by the worthy woman, who tried to be as a mother to her, that Mr. Raymond was satisfied his little girl was watched over and tenderly treated in every respect when, as occasionally happened, he had to leave home for a short time.

He devoted part of every day to her education, and a more apt, intelligent pupil no father could have desired. Lesson hours were to Mary almost as happy a time as that when she was taking long, delightful walks with him. So that she was his companion she was perfectly contented. And the days when he was too busy to be with her were black-letter ones to her.

So now it will be easily understood why she

had been so eagerly watching for him this evening, and why even glove-mending was welcome to her, much as she disliked her needle, because the gloves were *his*, and the holes in them made by *him*! She was almost jealous if Dorothy did anything for him that by any possibility *she* could do. Sometimes they had quite a contention together on this subject, and Dorothy was playfully called to order if she ever presumed to do any of the many little offices Mary had appropriated to herself.

‘You know, Dorothy, I promised mamma to take care of papa,’ was her constant reply to any remonstrance made that she was scarcely able to manage all she undertook. If he were in the smallest degree indisposed, the little girl was so attentive and so anxious to wait upon him, that he used sometimes laughingly to say it was almost a pity he could not have an illness, that she might have the pleasure of nursing him.

‘I don’t want you to be ill, papa,’ she would reply, ‘but if you were, *I* should be your nurse, you know, for mamma told me I was to be.’

‘And I would rather have my little Mary

for my nurse than any one,' replied her father to this remark one day ; 'but it is better still to have her as my companion in health, and so I hope her services in the other respect may not be needed.'

Mr. Raymond sometimes regretted that his child had no companions of her own age and standing ; and when there came an invitation to her about a year after her mother's death, to pay a visit to a relation who lived in an adjoining county, he was anxious she should accept it ; for his cousin, Mrs. Anderson, had a little girl rather younger than Mary, who would be a play-fellow for her whilst there, and who, he hoped, might be allowed to pay a visit to the vicarage in return.

It was not very easy to make Mary willing to leave home for some time. She could not bear the idea of leaving her father alone. However, seeing it was really his desire she should go, she was too really obedient not to try and be cheerful over the dreaded separation ; and when she found that not only would Mr. Raymond take her to Fairdown, where his cousin lived, but that he would remain there a

few days, she became quite reconciled to the plan.

It was getting late in the summer when they started on their journey. Henly was three miles' distance from the railway station, and it would take them about three hours by train to reach their destination. Fairland was a pretty village, lying in a more sheltered and picturesque locality than Henly. Mrs. Anderson's house was situated a little way out of the village. It was a small but bright-looking abode, surrounded by fields and trees.

Mrs. Anderson was a widow. She was pleased to see her cousin again, for they had not met for years, and their two children soon lost the first shyness after Helen Anderson had carried Mary off to her play-room, and displayed its treasures.

Mr. Raymond remained at Fairland nearly a week. He thankfully accepted his cousin's proposal that Mary should stay a long time with her, and share some music and other lessons which Helen received from a governess who came daily for several hours from the adjoining town of Cranwell. Though he dreaded the separation from his darling, he

was too much alive to the benefit she would derive from the plan not to sacrifice his own feelings.

But when the hour of parting came, Mary's grief almost amounted to agony as she clung round her father's neck. His own heart began to fail him, and he was almost tempted to carry her off with him.

'You must be brave, my little girl,' he said at last. 'You will be very happy here, and when Christmas arrives I shall come and take you home.'

'But you, papa,—how lonely you will be! I do not think mamma would have liked me to leave you all alone for so long.'

'She would have told you to be willing to do what is thought right and best for you, my child. And I am leaving you here that you may improve yourself, and become more my companion than ever; and you will learn to play the piano better, and we will have music together in the winter evenings. So cheer up, and do not let your kind cousins think you do not wish to stay with them.'

One more embrace and a whispered blessing on his child, and Mr. Raymond was gone.

At ten years old childhood soon begins to be reconciled to what needs *must* be, and Mary learned to take an interest in all that interested her cousin. They were so nearly of an age that they could enjoy the same games, learn the same lessons, and read the same books. Helen Anderson was charmed to get a constant companion, and Mary was very happy in spite of being so far from home; but oftener than was suspected her thoughts flew thither, and she would picture to herself what her father was doing at different times in the day. She often heard from, and still oftener wrote to him. And thus the time passed away, and winter began to advance with rapid pace. It seemed likely to be both an early and severe one; for by the middle of November the winds were biting and cold, and the ice was sufficiently thick on the ponds for venturesome boys to slide on them at all risks.

It had been decided that Mr. Raymond should fetch his little girl the week before Christmas.

‘I am longing for my child,’ he wrote to her, ‘now that the days are short and the

evenings long ; though I like to think how happy she is, and how fast she must be improving in many things which we must try to go on with together at home.'

About a week later, as the two children were busy in the school-room with their daily governess, the postman came with his usual short, loud rap one day, and dropped the letters into the box in the door. Soon afterwards Mrs. Anderson put her head into the room and beckoned out Mrs. Morland, the governess. It was some time before Mrs. Morland returned, and her face was unusually grave when she did so, but she said nothing, and continued the lessons which her absence had interrupted.

Mrs. Anderson was silent and abstracted at dinner, but as she had a bad cold coming on, it was easily accounted for to the children.

Later on in the day, a girl from the village, who often came in to help, brought some coals into the school-room, where Mary was sitting alone preparing her lessons for the next day. Helen had gone to bed early with a bad headache, a malady not unfrequent with her.

'How is your mother, Susan ?' asked Mary,

who had been trained to speak kindly to the poor, and to take an interest in their concerns.

‘I hope she is getting strong?’

‘Thank you, Miss Mary, she is better, I think.’

Then setting down the scuttle, she said :

‘And I do hope, Miss, as your papa isn’t so bad as they say he is in the kitchen’—

‘Susan, what *do* you mean?’ exclaimed Mary, bounding up from her seat with a vehemence that startled the girl. ‘My papa bad! tell me quick, quick, what you mean.’

‘Oh, Miss Mary, I thought you knew, or I’m sure I would not have said a word. I’m so sorry, and I’m afraid Mrs. Anderson will be angry with me.’

‘Susan, tell what you have heard; or stop, I would rather ask Cousin Laura.’

She flew from the room down to Mrs. Anderson, who was engaged in writing a letter.

‘Cousin Laura, what did Susan mean just now? She said she hoped papa was not so bad as they were saying in the kitchen. Is he ill? Oh, do tell me!’

‘I am sorry you have been told in this way



of your father's accident, my dear Mary,' said Mrs. Anderson. 'It is true that he is very ill. I have had a letter to-day from the medical man who is attending him, to tell me that he has been thrown out of a dog-cart on to his head. At first they supposed he was only stunned, as he did not speak when he was taken up, but now it is thought to be more serious. He is to be kept very quiet. And Dr. Needham hopes that in a day or two he will be better, and come quite to himself. He advised that you should not be told of what had happened till he could write and give a brighter account ; as he says he has known you all your life, and is sure it would only make you very unhappy to be told about it, till your dear father is well enough for you to go to him, and that, he says, cannot be at present, for he would not know you. He lies quite quiet and seems free from pain, and Dorothy is the best and tenderest of nurses, and Mrs. Needham, the doctor's wife, is gone to help her. I intended letting you know all this in a day or two, but as Susan has said what she did, I tell you now all I know myself.'

Mary had listened to every word in silence, but with a blanched face, and hands tightly clasped together. When Mrs. Anderson ceased speaking, she exclaimed :

‘Cousin Laura, I must go to papa directly ! indeed I must. I promised mamma before she died, that if he were ill I would be his little nurse ; and I know papa would like me to be with him. I *must* go ; oh, please let me !’

‘But, Mary, you could do no good, and Dr. Needham says so decidedly you had better not at present. Quietness is essential, and he is carefully watched over by two experienced nurses. You must wait till Dr. Needham writes for you, and then you shall go directly.’

‘Oh, I cannot, *cannot* wait !’ said the poor child in an agony of grief. ‘He may die as mamma did, and I away from him ! He will ask for me, and I shall not be there ! my own dear, sweet papa !’

Mrs. Anderson did not quite understand Mary’s character. Being of a calm and unimpassioned nature herself, she could not comprehend the intense anguish of Mary’s warm

and more impetuous one. She wished to be very kind and tender with her poor little cousin, but thought it right to be firm in refusing to let her go to her father till she was sent for. She knew the next two or three days would be critical ones with him, though the doctor gave every hope that he would eventually recover from the concussion which was the cause of his present unconsciousness. Finding Mary still pleaded vehemently that she *must* go, there was a touch of severity perhaps in her tone, as she told her that nothing should induce her to allow her to do so till Dr. Needham sent for her. Mary said no more ; she saw Mrs. Anderson was not to be turned from her resolve ; but her look of quiet misery the rest of the evening made her cousin feel very sorry for her. She did not talk, but sat thinking, with her hands for the most part lying listlessly in her lap, though every now and then she tried to read the book which Mrs. Anderson had lent her, in hopes it might turn her thoughts for a while.

She went to her little room and to bed, but could not sleep. She heard one hour after

another strike, and it was two o'clock before she fell into what was a doze rather than sleep, and in an hour or two she awoke again, and there came a sense of something wrong and miserable, though she could not at first remember what it was. Then followed the terrible recollection that her beloved parent was ill, and perhaps asking for her at that very moment; and she remembered how she had solemnly promised her mother to be his nurse. She sat up in bed. 'Oh, what *ought* I to do!' she said to herself; 'I think I must run away from here and go to him. I do not believe it would be very naughty to do so. Cousin Laura only thinks about what Dr. Needham says in his letter. She would let me go perhaps if she thought papa wanted me very much, and I know he does. And then there is my promise to mamma; surely it must be more wrong to break that than to go to him without leave.'

But how to go? How to get out of the house that dark wintry morning whilst everybody was asleep! Yet each moment was precious, for her father might be dying. Besides, if she waited till it was light and the

servants were up, she knew she should not be allowed to leave the house.

The station was about three miles off. The first step to be taken was to walk there. She knew there was a train went very early, because her father had gone by it when he left her. She thought nothing of the distance, for she was strong and hardy, and accustomed to go longer walks than that. Her only fear was lest she should lose the train.

She got out of bed and lighted a candle. Her mind was made up to try and get to her home. She put on all her warmest things and her thickest boots. Then she examined the state of her finances. She had seven shillings and some coppers. Mary had no idea how much her fare would be, but she had a vague sort of hope that if she had not enough they would believe her when she promised the rest would be sent.

She had not travelled enough to know that 'all or none' was the rule of the railway.

She went down-stairs, and as she passed the kitchen she remembered she must eat or she would be ill. Mary had abundance of practical common sense, and she used it, She

slipped into the larder, cut off some slices of bread, and drank a mugful of milk, which was her usual breakfast. She put the bread into her hand-basket, then softly unfastened the back door, and stepped out into the chilly morning air.

It was not more than half-past five o'clock, and quite dark, but there was light enough for her to see the path.

Most children's hearts would have failed them on finding themselves out alone at that hour ; but Mary had but one thought in her mind, 'Her father was ill and wanted her,' and this sent her fearlessly forwards.

Her way was along the high road. She knew it well, and was not afraid of taking any wrong turn ; but she was in an agony of apprehension lest she should not arrive in time to catch the early train. There was no other for several hours, and she would be missed at home, and Mrs. Anderson would be sure to guess that she would be found at the station, and so her chance of getting to her father that day would be gone.

When she had walked about a quarter of a mile she came to a cottage where

a boy lived who sometimes weeded Mrs. Anderson's garden, went errands, and did other various jobs about the place. His father kept a cart and pony with which he used to carry coals from the town for people in the village of Fairland who dealt in a small way in that useful commodity. Tom Finch was a lad of about fourteen ; he was very useful to his father, who often sent him to fetch coals when he was otherwise employed.

Mary had won the lad's heart some time ago by knitting him a long warm comforter, and often saying a kind word to him ; and on one occasion, when he was in trouble at having lost a shilling not his own in some long grass, she had given him one out of her own purse. He afterwards found the lost coin and brought it to her, but he was none the less grateful to her for her kindness, and always gave a double pull at his cap and got rather red and round-eyed with pleasure at sight of her.

The cottage door was open when she reached it. She ventured to peep in, for she heard a sound as of some one blowing

a fire, and had a faint hope it might be Tom, who, she was sure, would help her if he could.

Yes, sure enough it *was* Tom, and no one else was with him. He was blowing some sticks into a blaze to warm something in a saucepan on the hob.

‘Tom!’ said Mary in a half whisper.

He dropped the bellows, he was so startled.

‘Lauk! how you frighten a fellow!’ he exclaimed; ‘who are you?’

‘Don’t you know me, Tom?’ and Mary went up close to the fire, which was now crackling and burning up into a bright flame.

‘Why! Miss Mary, is it *you* out so early? Mercy on us, what’s the matter?’

‘Hush, Tom, don’t talk loud; I don’t want any one else to know I’m here.’

‘Father’s gone off for two days, and mother’s in bed up-stairs, so don’t be afeared, Miss; but what’s wrong?’

‘Tom, my father is very ill, and will perhaps die, and I am going to him, for I know he wants me; but my cousin, Mrs. Anderson, will not let me go yet, so I have



run off without telling her, and I am on my way to the station.'

Tom's eyes went wider open than they had ever done in their lives, and he exclaimed :

'Oh, my !'

'I think I *ought* to go, Tom, but I'm so afraid of missing the train, and it's a long way to walk in the dark. Could you come with me, do you think ?'

'Why, I'm going off just now to fetch some coals for Widow Kenyon. Father told me to be off by six o'clock. I could drive you in the cart, if you don't mind going in it. We should be at the station in no time.'

'Oh! thank you, Tom; and can you get off soon ?'

'In a jiffy, Miss. The pony is all ready; I've only got to put him into the cart.' And Tom made a stride towards a peg on which hung a warm jacket, into which he inserted his arms, and then giving himself a shake, said he was ready and would go and bring round the cart.

'But, Tom, you have had nothing to eat !'

The boy seized the saucepan and poured a not very tempting-looking mess of coffee into a mug that stood on the table, and gulped it down, heedless of its being still unwarmed. Then thrusting a hunch of bread into his pocket, he ran off. Almost quicker than seemed possible he brought the pony and cart to the door, and told Mary he was ready.

‘But, Miss Mary,’ he said, ‘I’m thinking whether you know what a lot of money it takes to buy one of them railway tickets when it’s to go to a distance; and you can’t beat them down a bit, they will have full price.’

‘I’ve got seven shillings,’ replied Mary; ‘do you think it will be enough?’

‘My stars, no!’ said the boy. ‘Wait a bit, though, I know what to do.’

He ran up-stairs into a closet dignified by the name of ‘Tom’s Room.’ In this was a small bed and a large box. He dropped on his knees before the latter article, opened the lid, and putting his hand down to the bottom at one corner, he fumbled about for an instant, and then brought up from under a weight of family Sunday

garments an old leather purse, in which were deposited the savings of nearly two years; for Tom had been in the habit of putting by a penny now and a penny then, whenever he could bring himself to a sufficient point of wisdom and self-denial to do so, which was not always; for when he had a penny to spare, a certain shop where marbles, and gingerbread, and toffee were sold, often changed a penny's intended destination when he passed it. However, certain it is that he had frequently mounted the stairs to the said box; for not only had his savings arrived at the dignity of being changed into silver, but a golden half-sovereign had lately taken the place of four half-crowns. Tom, having had a great desire to feel himself the honest possessor of a bit of gold, had effected the exchange with a market-woman.

With this beloved coin he now came running down-stairs.

'Here, Miss Mary,' he said, 'please put this here bit of gold in your purse; it's my own to give you, and with what you've got it will be enough, I'm thinking.'

‘Oh! Tom, I can’t take it; why, I ought to be giving you money, not taking yours!’

‘Just you take it, Miss Mary. You’re as welcome as sunshine in harvest, and I’d be glad if it were twice as much.’

‘Then I’ll borrow it, Tom, and my papa will pay you back again, and be much obliged to you, I know.’

Tom replied with something between a grunt and a ‘thankee.’ The grunt was forced out by a disappointed feeling that his gift was only accepted as a loan. The ‘thankee’ was the effusion of a rather pleasurable sensation he experienced, in spite of his generosity, on hearing his half-sovereign was one day to reappear.

The cart was not on springs, and was dirty inside from the effects of its constant coal freights; but Mary got up by the side of Tom, who put a little wooden stool for her feet, and bade her hold tight by his arm if she felt in any danger of falling off from the narrow ledge on which they had to sit. Mary at first assured him she should be quite steady, but when he put the brisk little pony into a gallop, she was glad to seize his arm and keep

a firm grasp of it till they arrived at the bottom of a hill, which obliged them to let the animal fall into a walk.

‘Miss Mary,’ said Tom, taking the opportunity to say what was on his mind, ‘I’m thinking that there’ll be a precious hue and cry after you as soon as it’s found you’ve bolted. Suppose I’m asked if I’ve seen anything of you,—it isn’t unlikely, you know, as it’ll be known I came along this here road early, and being the way to the station they’ll think I had a chance of passing you.’

Mary paused before she answered, for this brought a serious aspect of the affair before her. Here was Tom actually helping her in her runaway adventure, and she feared he would get into a scrape for doing so. If Mrs. Anderson gave up employing him in consequence, it would be a very great loss to him and his parents. Tom waited a moment, and finding she did not speak, settled the matter as he thought to their mutual satisfaction, by saying :

‘Well, if I’m asked, I’ll just say I know nothing about you, and that for certain sure I never saw you on the road coming or going ; and I haven’t neither, for sure enough it’s on

the *cart* you are, and not on the road at all.'

Mary, who had been brought up in habits of strict truthfulness, was shocked.

'Oh, no, no, no, Tom! You must tell the truth if you are asked. Say I asked you to go with me to the station, and you offered to drive me in your cart, as you were going that way to fetch coals. I am only so afraid lest Mrs. Anderson should be angry with you and turn you off altogether.'

'Never mind, Miss, if she do. I'll just look out for some one else as wants a boy. Don't you worrit about me no how.'

'Then you will promise me to tell the truth, Tom?'

'I will, Miss Mary.'

'And, Tom, do tell the truth always.'

'I'd like to,' said the boy; 'but I don't see how a fellow's always to do it if he's to get on.'

'Papa would tell you it's the best way to get on,' said Mary, 'and then it is so wicked to say what is not true.'

They were come to the top of the hill, and Tom touched up the pony so sharply that he

set off into a gallop again, and Mary could think of nothing but how to keep her seat. The station soon came in sight. Tom drove her to within a few yards of it. She jumped down and thanked him for bringing her, and for the loan of the money.

‘I’m thinking, Miss,’ said the boy (he was in the habit of beginning his sentences with these two words), ‘that it’s a terrible long journey for you to be going all alone, and on such a day too, for I’m afeared there’s a snowstorm coming on. Suppose you were just to let me drive you back again!’

‘Oh no, Tom,’ exclaimed Mary, backing from the cart and half afraid he was going to turn traitor. ‘I *must* go. I don’t mind the weather. Be sure and tell Mrs. Anderson the truth, and then she won’t be frightened about me. Good-bye, Tom.’

‘Good-bye, Miss, and a good journey to you,’ and Tom turned round his cart and drove away, only half satisfied with his morning’s work, for he had misgivings about Mary getting safe to her father.

Meanwhile Mary had entered the station and was looking about for some one to speak to.



"HE LOOKED INQUISITIVELY AT HER."



bustle in the station. Several people came who were going by that train. Some luggage was wheeled forward, and Mary saw that tickets were being taken.

She had watched her father, and knew just what to do. Taking out her purse, she asked for a second-class ticket to Newton. She thought her funds would not suffice for a first-class.

In a few minutes a bell rang and a distant puffing was heard, which grew louder and louder ; then the train steamed into the station, and every one hastened into their seats. Mary was hesitating which to choose, when the porter bustled up with, ' Now, Miss, take your seat.' And he hurried her into a carriage where there was a respectable-looking woman and a very delicate-looking man. Then the door was banged to, a whistle was sounded, the guard held up his hand as the signal for departure, and sprang into his box as the train moved off. Mary breathed more freely. She was off ! No one now could stop her from going to be her father's nurse !

The woman in the carriage looked kindly at her solitary little fellow-passenger, and put

a spare shawl over her knees, for it was bitterly cold. The delicate-looking man was her husband, and she seemed anxious about him. She told Mary he had had an illness, and they had been staying with a friend for change of air. Now they were travelling home.

Mary, in return, said that she was going to her father, who was ill; but she did not tell that she was come without leave. She felt hungry, and was glad to attack the bread she had in her basket, to which her new friend insisted on adding a slice of cold ham from her own more ample stores. Mary had slept so little the previous night that she could scarcely keep awake, which her companion perceiving, she advised her to take a good nap. The kind-hearted woman made her lean her head against her shoulder, and very soon the little girl slept soundly—too soundly, as it proved, for she did not awake till the day was well advanced, and the train pulled up at a place called Eltham.

Here her friend had to arouse her, for they had arrived at their home.

‘And where do you stop, my dear?’ she

asked ; 'you must take care and get out at the right station.'

'I am to stop at Newton,' replied Mary, 'which is the nearest station to Henly, where we live.'

'Newton, Newton!' said the delicate-looking man, stopping short as he was stepping out of the carriage ; 'why, we passed that some time ago. You have overshot your mark, little Miss, by a good bit I am afraid.'

Mary looked bewildered.

'See to the box being got out of the van, Sarah,' said the husband, 'and I'll speak to the guard. Here, my dear, show me your ticket. Newton sure enough it is. You must get out directly, and we will ask how soon there will be a train to take you back to Newton.'

The guard looked at the ticket and shook his head. He said this came of sending off children to travel alone, and that her friends ought to have given her in charge to him, and then he should have seen after her. His words made poor runaway Mary feel sadly guilty. She knew too well that the fault did not lie with her friends, but herself !

'Please, when can I go back ?' she asked.

'A train will come by in an hour,' said the guard, 'that does not stop at Newton; it is an express; but there will be one at 4.30 which pulls up there. So you must wait for that; and mind you look sharp, and don't be passing it a second time.'

Off went the train, leaving Mary and her fellow-passengers standing on the platform. The poor child was so distressed that for the moment her courage forsook her, and she burst into tears.

'Now don't you cry, dearie,' said Mrs. Morris, for such was her name; 'you shall come home with us and have a bit of something to eat, and warm yourself well, and my boy Jack shall see you into the train at 4.30, and tell the guard to put you out at Newton; so it will all come right if you cheer up.'

And Mary did cheer up, for she had a brave spirit of her own; and well it was she had, for she had sore need of it before that day was over.

Outside the station they met the said Jack coming with a wheelbarrow to take his parents' luggage to their house. He was a

good-natured, merry-looking lad of about sixteen, who appeared very glad to see his father and mother again; and hearing of Mary's misfortune, he told her 'never to mind,' for he would see her safe off by the right train, and it would take her back to Newton in no time.

The Morris's house was not far from the station. A pleasant-looking daughter, older than Jack, was waiting to receive them. The table was ready for dinner, and a roast leg of mutton was an acceptable sight to the travellers. Mary was made as welcome as if she were an old friend. Good Mrs. Morris would perhaps have hesitated about sending her off again alone had she known all the circumstances of her journey; but she was so taken up with asking and answering questions after their long absence, and with attending to her husband, who was a good deal knocked up by his journey, that she did not ask her young guest much about herself, though she took care that she was well warmed and fed. She put some ginger lozenges in a paper for her, to help keep out the cold, she said, and she charged Jack to see her into a comfortable

corner of a carriage, and give her in charge of the guard.

Jack faithfully fulfilled his trust. The guard undertook to see she was landed at Newton. And so again she was whirled off in the train. This time her companions were two farmers, who talked a great deal about their crops, and about farming in general. Mary listened from her corner, but with no interest, till one of them, looking out of the window, remarked that it had begun to snow, and that it was going to be a very severe storm, he believed. Not till now had Mary thought much about the three-mile distance that lay between Newton station and Henly. She had often walked it with her father, and in daylight and fine weather it would have been nothing to her to trudge along the road and over the moor. But now it was getting quite dark. The lamp in the top of the carriage made the world outside look so like a black sheet, that her heart quailed a little, and she almost dreaded the train stopping at Newton and having to quit its warm shelter.

But again the recollection of her father called up her courage, and she would have

faced a still greater distance rather than not get to him as soon as possible.

The train went slower. It stopped ! 'Newton,' called out a porter's voice, and Mary sprang from her seat. The guard opened the door and lifted her out. There was no other passenger alighted. Newton was a small station, and not much business went on there at any time. The guard was in a hurry to get on, for the train was late, and he almost grudged losing even a minute or two for only one solitary child. Off it went, snorting and puffing, and Mary found herself standing by a porter who held a bright lantern in his hand, which he turned so as to throw its light upon the face of the little muffled-up figure beside him.

'And where be you bound for, little Miss?' he asked. He was a new man lately come, so Mary's face was not familiar to him, as it would have been to the former porter.

'I am going to Henly,' replied she.

'To Henly, to-night!' he exclaimed. 'Why, it will be a tempting of Providence for such a young one as you to cross the moor in this snow-storm. It's a-coming up from the north like mad.'

‘I know my way,’ said Mary, ‘and it’s not so very dark.’

‘There’s a bit of a moon,’ said the man, ‘but for all that it’ll be a bad walk for you. I should not like my Jessie to take it to-night, and she’s bigger than you.’

Perhaps it was the thought of his own daughter that made his heart pity Mary so much that he added :

‘If you like to come home with me, my cottage is not far off, and you can sleep with Jessie, and go off to Henly by daylight. My wife will be kind to you, I know.’

‘Thank you, you are very good,’ replied Mary, ‘but I must go to-night. My father is ill and I want to get to him. I am not afraid. I know the road well.’ She walked off. The man looked after her for an instant. He could almost have found it in his heart to have gone with her. But there was the station room to lock up, and his wife and Jessie would be waiting for supper, by the side of a good fire. He must let that there young ‘un take her chance since she *would* go off, he muttered.

Mary’s way lay along the high road for a



considerable distance. Fortunately there was a high hedge on one side, and this was some slight shelter against the keen wind that was blowing from the north, and driving large flakes of snow before it. The exertion of walking in this wind was very great to our poor little traveller, but she plodded on and on, sometimes standing still to take breath, and then starting with fresh force. At length she came to the place where a stile enabled pedestrians to take a short cut to Henly by crossing the common instead of going the longer way round by the road. Mary had intended to have gone the shorter way, but when she tried to get over the stile she found she could not do so. The wind came furiously over the moor and almost threw her backwards.

She saw that it would be impossible for her to stand against it on the open ground, and that she must keep by the side of the friendly, sheltering hedge. One cheering sight, however, she saw as she stood clinging to the stile. She knew that those distant twinkling lights were at Henly. Every step now brought her nearer to her darling father, and the thought

gave strength to her tired feet, and she again set off on the long dreary route by the road. Two miles nearly still had to be traversed, with wind and snow driving her back, love and courage urging her on! Mental strength struggled hard to persevere, but physical power was insufficient, and at length the child sank down by the side of the road entirely exhausted. 'Father, father!' she exclaimed; 'I can't get on; I have tried to reach you.' Then a desire to sleep came over her, to which only her anxiety to get up and go on prevented her yielding. But she was too wearied to rise; so she lay still on the hard snowy ground, and was fast losing consciousness when something warm passed all over her face and she opened her eyes. A familiar bark broke upon her ear, and she knew that Bruno, her own dear dog, Bruno, was licking her face and capering about her, barking with excitement and pleasure. Then came the sound of wheels and of voices, and in another moment she was lifted from the ground by Dr. Needham and her father's own out-door servant, and carried to the doctor's close carriage, in which he had just been passing

when Bruno's bark drew attention to some one lying on the raised footpath.

Great was the doctor's amazement when, by the light of the carriage lamps, he found it was the vicar's little daughter he held in his arms. How she came there alone and half frozen on such a night he had no time then to inquire. His first business was instantly to make her swallow a restorative cordial which he had in his carriage, and which so revived her that in a few minutes she could speak. Her first words were, 'Please take me to papa.'

Dr. Needham had just left Mr. Raymond, who had that afternoon recovered consciousness and was going on favourably, but still needed perfect repose. On leaving him the doctor had taken his servant with him that he might return with some medicine that it was important his master should take as soon as possible. The man took Bruno for companionship on his stormy walk back. Thus it was that our little runaway had been found, and her life probably saved.

The doctor ordered the horse's head to be turned, and he drove back to the vicarage,

where Dorothy was at first as one struck dumb with astonishment, and then she almost wept over her tired, pale-looking darling. A cup of warm broth, however, did wonders towards making Mary herself again, and still more revivifying was it to know that the dear parent for whom she had braved so much was better. She might not see him, but to be at home and near him was enough for the present.

She soon made her confession, and told how she had left Fairland in the early morning unknown to any one but Tom, and she explained how the unfortunate circumstance of being carried on too far in the train had caused her to arrive at Newton so late; and how, after struggling with the wind for so long, she at length could go no farther.

Dr. Needham listened, and tears gathered in his eyes as he did so, but he only said: 'You did a daring and a rash thing, my little girl. Thank God that you did not lose your own life in coming to look after your father's. Now let Dorothy put you to bed, and I shall see you again in the morning.'

Mary was soon in her own snug, white-curtained little bed, and asleep in one minute.

She never moved or woke till nearly the middle of the following day, and then arose as blythe and as well as if the adventure of the previous day had never taken place. In the evening, she was allowed to see her father for ten minutes, to her great joy.

Mr. Raymond improved rapidly, and Mary was soon able to be established as his nurse in many ways. When he heard of her elopement he could not scold, though he showed her she had done wrong.

‘My darling, you should have obeyed orders,’ he said; ‘you see how nearly your not doing so cost you your life, and me my precious little daughter.’

‘But, papa, I was afraid you might die, and I did love you so dearly.’

‘Then the love shall wipe out the fault, at least in your father’s eyes, my child; but you must write and ask forgiveness from Cousin Laura.’

Poor Mrs. Anderson had indeed been seriously alarmed when Mary’s room was found empty. She at once guessed where she had gone, and her suspicions were confirmed when she sent to the station, and heard that a

little girl answering to the given description had taken a ticket for Newton. She had perfect confidence in Mary's being able to manage the journey by herself, young as she was; and as, of course, she knew nothing of her mistake in passing by Newton station, she was saved the anxiety she would otherwise have felt about her.

She wrote to Henly by that night's post, as there was no telegraph thither, and was greatly relieved when she received one from Dr. Needham, saying her little cousin was safe at home.

Mary's letter of apology to her was a very humble one. She enclosed a cheque from her father to Tom for £1, by way of payment for the 10s. he lent her; and she expressed her hope that he was still employed about the house. Her cousin wrote a satisfactory reply to this question, and her full forgiveness to herself. When Mr. Raymond was quite recovered, Mrs. Anderson and Helen came and paid a long visit to the vicarage, and very glad the young cousins were to be together once more.

Before taking leave of Mary, it is due to her

to state, that she was never again known to take the management of affairs into her own hands contrary to orders, as she did on the memorable occasion we have been recording.

THE END.

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